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✖ HEX TROUT AT NIGHT ✖ THE WORLD'S GREATEST LURE

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TESTS**

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MAY 2015

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WALLEYES: TROLL THE BEAST SPREAD

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By David E. Petzal

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FROM THE EDITOR

F&S

Raised for the Job

INTRODUCING A MODERN HUNTING EDITOR FOR THE MODERN FIELD & STREAM

WRITER WILL BRANTLEY is a familiar face to the FIELD & STREAM audience. Over the last few years, Brantley has been producing some of the best stories, articles, and videos in the magazine and on **fieldandstream.com**, including exciting hunting tales, how-to pieces on cutting-edge tactics, and detailed and unbiased gear tests of bows and other equipment. Beginning this month, readers are going to be seeing a lot more of Brantley as he joins F&S full-time in the new position of hunting editor.

As Brantley puts it, he has been preparing for this job since age 7, when he killed his first squirrel (using a single-shot .22 with a broken extractor that required prying out empties with a pocketknife) in his native Kentucky woods.

Brantley majored in journalism at Murray State University with the goal of being an outdoor writer. He completed two internships at *Outdoor Life*, F&S's sister publication, before starting his career as a writer. In addition to his freelance work for F&S, Brantley has also worked for *FLW Outdoors* and *Ducks Unlimited* magazines and for Realtree.com.

Becoming F&S's hunting editor is Brantley's "dream come true." He'll be the latest in a long line of passionate outdoorsmen and superb communicators who have traveled around North America to bring F&S readers the latest trends, tactics, and stories from the field. Unlike some greats of the past—men like Ted Trueblood, Warren Page, and Bob Brister to name a few—Brantley has at his disposal all the tools that have revolutionized storytelling in the digital age. Based out of rural Kentucky, he can spend the morning in a treestand and be back at his desk to share information almost in real time through videos, photos, and written reports on **fieldandstream.com** and social-media channels.

Although the tools available to a hunting editor are changing rapidly, the core of the job entails some timeless fundamentals. It requires a passion for hunting that's equaled by a determination to protect the animals, woods, waters, and fields that our way of life depends upon. It requires an endless curiosity to learn and share better ways to do things. And it requires a deep understanding that outdoorsmen are a community, and that sharing your own love for the sports through great storytelling is the best way to teach, inspire, and keep these great American traditions strong. These qualities make Brantley the ideal hunting editor, and I can't wait to see what he brings to the role.

Anthony Licata, Editor-in-Chief
anthony.licata@fieldandstream.com
[@anthonylicata](http://anthonylicata.com)



CONTRIBUTORS



A stay at Cree River Lodge in Saskatchewan ("Crash Course," p. 66) ranks in the top five of many trips for F&S fishing editor **Joe Cermele**. "I was already addicted to catching big pike on the fly," says Cermele. "But we caught so many big fish in just a few days, I walked away thinking: You may never see action like that again."



It took a trip to New Jersey and two trips to Ohio for **Nathaniel Welch** to photograph the trout and walleye for "Monster Weekend" (p. 51), and another to Michigan for the smallmouth on the cover. "These are wild fish caught the normal way—not props from a tank," says Welch, who also shoots for *Men's Health*, *People*, *Esquire*, and others. "The big ones are never guaranteed."

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PHOTOGRAPHER: TIM ROMANO
LOCATION: SAN MARCOS, TEXAS





FIRST SHOT

SHOULDER-SEASON SUCCESS

* Photographer Tim Romano climbed the foot pegs on an old cypress tree with a rope swing to capture this shot of angler Jeff Rogers carrying his kayak to the put-in on the San Marcos River outside of Austin last November. Typical of early spring and late fall, “the weather had been really iffy,” says Romano, “cold and rainy for the past two days. And the water

was off-color, so we weren’t sure if it was going to fish.” Since unfortunate circumstances had brought him to town, Romano needed a restorative experience on this float—and he got it. “It turned out to be a spectacular day. We had fish on with every other cast for three or four hours.”

He landed one of his biggest largemouth bass to date, and the

crew, including guide Marcos Rodriguez, who manned the canoe pictured on shore, hooked countless “guads”—Guadalupe bass, the state fish—and one cichlid. “Jeff and I traded off. One of us was in the canoe with fly gear and one was in the kayak with conventional gear throwing Senko worms,” adds Romano. “The action was just silly.” —KRISTYN BRADY

CHEERS & JEERS

THERAPY SESSIONS IN A TREESTAND, A STEELHEADER'S HEIST, AND MUCH ADO ABOUT MONEY



TWICE AS NICE
Just read your magazine cover to cover. I'm always sad when it is done. This shout-out is to Heavey for "Chasing the Chrome" and "The Stand." I laughed, I cried, and I gave thought to how precious life is.
Chris Booth,
Rochester Hills,
Mich.

firearms during better times, even when they had nothing to do with the suicide itself years later.

Thank you, Bill Heavey, for your sentiments. Thank you, FIELD & STREAM, for having the courage to publish it.

Bob Gross, Gardiner, Maine

MORE LIKE STEALHEAD

In "Chasing the Chrome," Bill Heavey tells of his fishing partner's trick of purchasing a boat battery and using it for two days. He then returned it for a refund, having gotten his use out of it. That's called stealing, Bill. What were you guys thinking? Merchants in rural northern California have a tough time anyway without being victimized by people who take without paying. Shame on you.

Fred Fawcett, Lafayette, Ore.

BILL HEAVEY RESPONDS: Mikey broke no law. The store was a Walmart, which has probably hurt more merchants in rural northern California than Mikey has. Also, this was in Monterey—central California. But I do take your point. My intent was to describe, rather than condone, Mikey's behavior.

Bill Heavey just keeps getting better and better. Two articles in the same issue—one hilarious, the other stone-cold serious and insightful. Make a wish, Bill, you deserve it.

Bob Owen, Big Canoe, Ga.

BILL HEAVEY RESPONDS: I wish the magazine hadn't printed Mr. Fawcett's letter.



Oh, Wad a Sieve!

A mesh sink strainer sitting on top of a coffee can separates any shot and powder that have been spilled as you reload shells. Pour the mix into the strainer and tap the can.

John W. Robinson,
Bethel, Conn.



If your tip is chosen, we'll send you a new Buck 102 Woodsman knife and sheath.



LIFE, DEATH, AND DEER HUNTING
At 63 now, I've subscribed, borrowed, or stolen F&S off and on since I was 12 years old. Bill Heavey's column ("The Stand," A Sportsman's Life, March 2015) was the most irrelevant, yet relevant, article I've ever read in F&S or any other magazine of the type. Heavey put me in that treestand, and now 20 minutes later my eyes are still smarting. I love the outdoors for a lot of reasons, but solitude and time for reflection are very near the top.

Les Byrd, Eaton, Ohio

There's a lot of truth in Mr. Heavey's very well written article. My dad—my hunting mentor and partner, my best friend—committed suicide in Feb. 2012. It shocked me down to my very core and changed my own and my fam-

ily's lives forever. I went through a lot of emotions—mostly anger—but ultimately found forgiveness. I recall in our early hunting days how we'd pass my stand first going through the woods. As I settled in, I'd see Dad's green light make it up the tree to his stand. I would know it was time for me to pack up when I'd see the light coming down. That 2012 deer season was awful, as it really hit home about him being gone when I looked across the field, to his stand, and realized I'd never see that green light again. His stand still hangs in that big oak, untouched and un-hunted. I truly miss him.

Brandon Napier, Rensselaer, Ind.

"The Stand" was very comforting for suicide survivors like me who feel guilty about having introduced a suicide victim to sporting

PICK A SIDE ALREADY

Concerning T. Edward Nickens's "Tip of the Month" ("Portage Authority," The Total Outdoorsman), an experienced canoe stern paddler does not flip-flop from his left to right side with his paddle while canoeing. That is a sure sign of someone who has never paddled much or never learned how to do a J-stroke. The stern paddler can still match the bow paddler's rhythm, and occasionally switch sides to ease muscles, but it is not necessary to paddle on the same side to maintain a desired course or speed.

Judd Knaup, Bellevue, Mich.

T. EDWARD NICKENS RESPONDS: Sadly, my 36 years of paddling experience have been limited to big multiday expeditions in Alaska, Quebec, Ontario, a possible first

descent in Labrador, and who knows how many Southern rivers, so I'm sure I have more to learn. But I'll not "flip-flop" on this one. I stick by my prescription for occasionally switching sides efficiently and nearly instantly as a fine break to endless miles of J-stroking.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Thank you to Phil Bourjaily for "The Longest Yards" (Shot-guns). Pattern density, consistency, and aim are very important to making an ethical shot on a turkey. Hunters should have respect for their game and be proficient with their equipment. There are too many marketing ploys advertising long-range ammunition that give hunters a false sense of their gun's capabilities.

Aaron Clark, Redkey, Ind.

WHAT, NO \$500 FILLET KNIFE?

Hey, Joe Cermele and Ted Lee-som: What is your budget when you evaluate and hand out awards to new fishing gear ("Best of the Best")? Do you ever consider the poor sap who has to work for a living and isn't making a half million a year? Two hundred and thirty bucks for a boat bag? Is it made of gold? And \$23 for a lure, or \$25 for a travel mug? These are things that get lost on almost every fishing trip. If you guys ever have a feel-good moment, I'll take the \$280 pliers... just so I can say that I own a pair of \$280 pliers.

Pat Tundra, Cary, Ill.

JOE CERMELE RESPONDS: One of the biggest factors I test for when evaluating Best of the Best gear is quality, because I believe the gear

should last. Unfortunately, in today's world, quality is getting more and more costly. Sure, you can buy a cheaper dry bag, or mugs and pliers at the dollar store, but I would rather invest more money on gear that I trust will last for the long haul rather than drink cold coffee and replace the rusty pliers in my cheap, faulty dry bag every season.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS (AND DOLLARS)

Anthony Licata's column ("Money Talks," From the Editor) says more about who we sportsmen are than anything I have read lately. The general public has no idea how much we as a group contribute to conservation. By joining the organizations mentioned, we also contribute to the future of our sports.

Chip Syombathy, via e-mail

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WOODS WORK

Hunting an Eastern gobbler in the hard-woods is a tactical chess match that demands your best calling and the perfect setup

By Will Brantley

CAMPFIRE



Tag Team •

A hunter prepares
for his shot on a
Kentucky gobbler.





IT'S A GAMBLE, sneaking up here in the dark so close to the roost. Yesterday afternoon, after our tom quit gobbling, F&S deputy editor Colin Kearns and I found this sunken roadbed on a ridgeline in the old-growth hardwoods. It was laced with strut marks and flush with tender new greenery and insects. The turkey, we figured, had flown down and struttet right here after first light. Had Kearns and I known about this spot, we'd have killed him yesterday morning. Which is why we've wagered an extra hour of sleep and come back this morning for another chance at the bird.

We sit against two white oaks in the dark and wait on the first roaring gobble of the day, assuming he has to be roosted close. But when the dawn chorus begins, the tom gobbles on another ridge, 300 yards away. Kearns and I can stay put and hope he comes back, or hustle to a new spot. We hustle.

GET IN THE ZONE

It's easy to question turkey hunting's difficult reputation after you've seen a tom beat the hell out of a plastic jake staked 10 yards from a blind in a wide open field. Challenging a turkey's dominance with a decoy is the tactic of choice for many hunters, though, because it is a fast, effective way to kill a bird. I can't find fault with that.

But the classic gobbler game—the one with chess-match strategy—still gets played in the timber against big, thundering Eastern toms. A smart



Carry On An Arkansas hunter crosses a creek with a hefty Eastern longbeard over his shoulder.

Soon they're drumming just out of sight. Their wing tips in the leaves sound like dragging rakes.

hunter plots his moves two or three in advance: Shifting to the next ridge may spook him—but it might bring him right to you, gobbling the whole way. He'll sound like a man walking his final steps if the leaves are dry, and if you're set up correctly, he'll be in range when you see him for the first time.

Consistently killing turkeys in the timber requires good calling, preferably with a mouth call, which is more versatile than a box or slate. And in a tight setting like this, your hands need to be on your gun. More so than calling, however, it's the setup that will make or break your shot. Sure, you'll call up the occasional kamikaze 2-year-old from a half mile, but most timber toms seem to have a zone—a distance from which they can't help but respond—and if you

can slip to within that zone before setting up, your odds of killing that turkey double. Maybe even triple.

I'm happy if I can get within 100 yards of a turkey, but 75 yards is an in-zone guarantee. You'll spook some turkeys sneaking that close, but the payoff is so high, I'll take that chance over and again. To get in the zone during daylight, you have to use the terrain to your advantage. Even dense foliage won't hide you from a turkey that's 50 yards away, but they can't see through hills. If keeping a hill between you and the turkey requires circling for a half mile and ultimately crawling the last few steps to the perfect tree, do it. Of course, knowing where a turkey is roosted is even better. Get there an hour before daylight, and you can sneak in close enough to see the gobbler's limb shaking as he wakes up—and close enough to be in gun range when he flies down.

THE HUSTLE

Kearns and I had hoped for a bird in range at fly-down, but our problem is common enough: Eastern turkeys don't always roost in the same tree. So we sneak to the base of our ridge, cross a small beanfield, and work our way onto the next ridge, where we now know our turkey spent the night. He's gobbling a fair bit, but to our delight, two more toms are roosted near him, and they haven't shut up all morning. We end up sitting against a walnut tree with a subtle rise 25 yards ahead between the turkeys and us. Any birds that we call in will have to break over that rise to find the source of our calls, and by the time they do that, they'll be in gun range.

Overcalling can keep a roosted tom on the limb, but these birds have hit the ground by the time we set up, so I don't hold back. A lonesome hen is pushy, and I want to sound the part. Our original turkey gobbles some but nothing compared with the other two. They are so taken that they can't resist steering toward us. I pour on the yelps and cutts, and when their gobbling becomes frantic and close, I antagonize them with my best trick of all: silent indifference. Soon they're drumming just out of sight. Their wing tips in the leaves sound like dragging rakes. Kearns and I have our guns on our knees. "Here they come," I whisper. A golden fan unfurls just over the rise, then two Easterns step into view.

Kearns and I each carry a tom back to the truck. It's a perfect spring morning. You could even call it classic.



LUMBERJACK PACK

When I'm hunting turkeys in the hardwoods, I trade my vest for a small camo fanny pack with some extra shotgun shells, a bottle of water, a granola bar, face paint, and a few mouth calls. Setting up on a turkey that is 75 yards away requires stealth and sometimes speed, and a loaded vest only adds weight and bulk. I use a V-cut triple-reed call 90 percent of the time because its raspy sound suits my aggressive calling style (my favorites are a Zink Calls Lucky Lady and a David Halloran Total Knock Out). But a double-reed, like a Zink Z-Yelper, is great for tree yelps and other soft sounds.

—W.B.

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SHOTGUNS

A SHOT SHOW DIARY

What our Shotguns editor saw—whether he wanted to or not—at the year's biggest gun trade show **By Phil Bourjaily**

DAY ONE

Las Vegas, Nev., 8:25 A.M. Hallways in the Sands Expo & Convention Center are packed before doors open. Dress ranges from business casual to tattooed tactical. Plenty of jeans and camo ball caps mixed in, too. Uniformed convention-center personnel hold signs on sticks high above crowd reading "SHOT Show," as if 64,000 people attending a gun and hunting trade show could be anything else.

8:30 Step onto show floor. My 16th show, and it's still like entering the world's largest Toys "R" Us, with 12½ miles of aisles and 1,300 exhibitors. Smoky Baby white smoke-phase turkey hen decoy in the Flambeau/M.A.D. booth catches my eye. If it shows up here, it'll show up in woods.

8:45 Booth locations change little from year to year. Perazzi is still across from Mossberg. I can afford the latter's guns but

want the former's. Step into huge Perazzi booth, fondle \$60,000 shotguns.

9:00 At F.A.I.R. booth, spot oddly named Pathos o/u. No one needs a gun named Pathos except maybe Bill Heavey, who's here. Make note to recommend it to him.

10:00 Stop at Ruger booth to see Red Labels, only to find they have been discontinued. Gun couldn't be made at its price point and took up too much factory space. Ruger guy says new shotgun on the drawing board. We'll see. Why make shotguns when pistols and AR-style rifles sell?

10:30 Suppressors are big this year. SilencerCo has Benelli with Salvo 12 suppressors on that reduce report of 12-gauge to .22 LR level. At \$1,400, they look like slim car muffler on gun barrel and add 2 pounds of weight. Would I need two for my o/u? Slogan is great: "Fight the noise."

SnapSHOT •

The year's big gun trade show drew 64,000 people.

11:00 New ATK (Federal/Savage/Bushnell) booth looks like interactive gun-and-ammo museum. Larger-than-life-size models of Federal bullets and shotshells, rows of Savage guns on pegs, informative ammo exhibits in glass cases. Booth's corner theater full of people there to see Swamp Person Troy Landry.

12:00 P.M. Lunch at L.L. Bean hospitality room. Chicken tagine. Not bad.

1:00 Funny R. Lee Ermey at Glock booth is always SHOT's biggest draw. Long line in aisle forces me into crowded CZ-USA booth. It's like a fish trap: You can get in but not out. While stuck there I see a new short-recoil semiauto, CZ 812. Sells for \$699 in camo with five extended chokes. Make note to get one to review.

1:05 Spot third tactical kilt of SHOT Show and it's only Day One.

1:30 Visit with five-time Olympic medalist Kim Rhode in Beretta booth.

1:45 Two guys playing hooky from nearby home-builders' show who have snuck in with borrowed passes stop me for photos.

2:00 Pass yet another 3-gun shooter signing autographs in a handgun booth. I can't name a single 3-gun shooter, but these men and women are rock stars to SHOT crowd.

3:00 Meeting with Fabarm runs long. Late to meet *SHOT Daily*'s Dave Maccar at UTAS booth. He's gone. Ask "Was there a guy with a beard, shaved head, three earrings, and black T-shirt in here half an hour ago?" Booth guy looks at me like I'm an idiot. This is SHOT. Maccar blends in.

3:30 Realtree booth looks like fancy log home. It's nicer than my house, with better couches, too.

4:00 Spot retired MMA champ Matt Hughes in Browning booth.

4:30 Aguila ammunition booth seemingly contains no ammunition. What it does have is models in short, skintight dresses handing out T-shirts. They are giving away lots. I take one.

5:00 Pass Blaser booth. Notice an F3 youth target o/u with recoil reducer and short, fully adjustable stock for \$5,500. Youth clay target sports are getting more serious by the year. Kids are starting younger. Make note to have our high school team practice more.

5:30 Leave show floor. Spot Willie Robertson wannabe in beard, American flag shirt, and red-white-and-blue bandanna. Actually, it might be Willie.

DAY TWO

8:00 A.M. Go to Bushnell breakfast to see Dave Petzal win Bill McRae Lifetime Optics Achievement Award. Also, Bushnell awards a check for \$350,000 to Folds of Honor foundation, which gives scholarships to families of military wounded and KIA. One-legged Army major receives check. He is not the only person I see missing one or both legs.

10:00 Natureblinds makes giant stump-shaped blinds. I step inside one;



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it's huge. Has to be trailered; too big for pickup bed. Bark pattern outside, 3 inches of foam insulation, and sealed windows. Family of hobbits could live in here year-round.

10:45 See WafflePro waffle iron that makes waffles with antlered deer head design.

12:00 P.M. Lunch at *Field & Stream/Outdoor Life* suite. Take chance on the grilled mahi

entrée from convention-center catering.

1:00 Back downstairs. TV's Gator Boys at BugBand booth take pictures with fans and pretend to wrestle giant stuffed toy alligator. BugBand PR woman tells me she almost got real alligator into convention center.

1:20 Search for vestiges of zombie trend; "Zombie Girl" at BulletSafe booth is on break.

BulletSafe people show me their bulletproof dog vest, ask if upland hunters would buy them. Me: no. End awkward silence by suggesting hog hunters might use them on hounds.

2:10 Spot T-shirt reading LONG RANGE SHOOTING—IF GOD WANTED ME TO GET CLOSE, HE WOULD HAVE MADE ME INVISIBLE.

2:30 Hevi-Shot has new Hog Wild hog loads, loaded with two or three .625 balls. Introduced in mid 2014, it was still one of very few new shotshell products at SHOT.

3:15 At Ithaca booth. New tactical bolt-action rifle, but no new shotguns. Bummer.

3:45 See friend Lou from Connecticut Shotgun Manufacturing in Standard Manufacturing shirt holding bizarre shotgun that is actually two bottom-eject pumps side by side, controlled by one trigger and one slide. Pump, pull trigger twice, pump, repeat as needed. New venture and brand for CSMC, chasing tactical dollars. Et tu, Lou?

4:00 Leave lower floor. Visit new-products center in convention-center hallway. Very few hunting products. Mostly tactical guns and gear, plus set of rhinestone-encrusted hearing protectors. Hunting used to drive this industry; no longer. In shooting sports, black is the new orange.

DAY THREE

9:00 A.M. Make gun videos for F&S website. Take break when I can no longer talk straight.

11:30 Bathrooms full, but not overflowing. By my reckoning, that makes this a very busy but not record year. (Later learn SHOT 2015 is second biggest ever.)

12:00 P.M. Lunch line at the good fried-chicken stand is too long. Eat protein bar plus candy and jerky scrounged from bowls in various booths.

12:10 Trudge endless aisles rest of afternoon. The show still overwhelms after all these years. Time to retire from SHOT 2015 and write up my list of the show's top 10 shotguns:

1. Benelli 828U o/u (shown)
 2. Remington V3
 3. Syren XLR5 Waterfowler
 4. Weatherby Orion o/u
 5. Browning Cynergy
 6. Winchester SXP Trap and Trap Compact
 7. Cabela's Dickinson Plantation Grade
 8. Stevens 555 o/u
 9. Mossberg 835 Turkey with Marble Peep Sight
 10. Beretta A400 Action Left Hand
- To my surprise, when I look at my list, 2015 turns out to be a good shotgun year after all. 

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Steve West, of Steve's Outdoor Adventures, navigates, communicates and provides his family with peace of mind by carrying an inReach Explorer wherever the game takes him.



RIFLES

SHOOT IN BULK

Don't let the high price of hunting ammo keep you off the practice range. Use cheap military rounds to stay sharp.

By David E. Petzal

AFTER MANY decades of practicing their dark art in obscurity, snipers are not only trendy but glamorous. But I don't think any of the gee-whiz reporting on them has given an accurate idea of the inhuman amount of range time it takes to earn the designation Scout/Sniper. A Marine, for example, must be qualified as Expert with the M16A2 rifle just to get into Sniper School. Then he goes through a 12½-week program where he'll get four hours of shooting a day and burn a total of more than 1,500 rounds. That's several lifetimes' worth of ammunition for the average hunter. My point: Good rifle shots

shoot a lot. The government picks up the Marine's ammo bill. You and I are not so fortunate.

THE PRACTICE RIFLE

Most rifle ammunition, especially quality hunting ammo, has become so expensive that many simply cannot afford to go burning up boxes of the stuff at the range. So what are we to do?

The answer is to run out and buy another gun—specifically, one chambered for .308 or .223 (assuming you don't already have one of these). It may be your latest hunting rifle or just a practice gun. Either way, and almost no matter what you

RANGE TEST

On a bitter winter day, I tested five types of bulk ammo. For each, I shot three groups at 100 yards and then took the average. Here are the results.

- [1] **Federal 7.62 149-gr. FMJ**
\$17 for 20; cabelas.com
Average group size: 2.623"
- [2] **Herter's Select Grade .308 150-gr. SP**
\$18; cabelas.com
Average group size: 1.254" (This is hunting ammo that I grabbed at Cabela's because of its very low price. It has a big old exposed-lead tip that will dump deer with dispatch.)
- [3] **PMC Bronze .308 147-gr. FMJ**
\$16; cabelas.com
Average group size: 2.386"
- [4] **PPU .308 145-gr. FMJ**
\$12; cabelas.com
Average group size: 1.618" (I hadn't heard of this before. It's made in Serbia by Prvi Partizan; obviously they know what they're doing.)

- [5] **Winchester 7.62 147-gr. FMJ**
\$22; kitterytradingpost.com
Average group size: 2.298"

The brand you don't see here is Wolf, because I could not find it. It's very cheap and works fine, though it tends to foul heavily.

Warning:

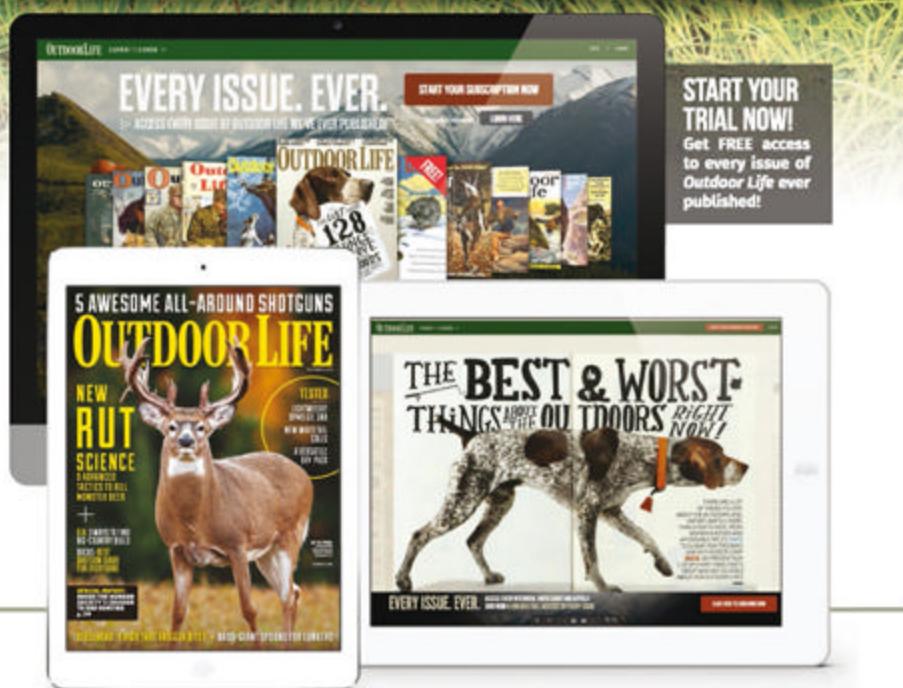
Before you buy anything, check with your range for its rules on military ammo. Don't plink with this stuff; it ricochets. —D.E.P.

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pay for it, it will save you oodles in the long run and allow you to keep right on shooting.

That's because there are tons—literally—of cheap military or military-type ammo made in 7.62mm (.308) and 5.56mm (.223). All you need is a gun to shoot it through. And it just so happens that there are more well-broken-in rifles chambered for those rounds than the locusts that Moses called down on Egypt.

You don't need something expensive. It must have a decent trigger, and go bang when you pull that trigger, and shoot fairly well, but that's about it. There are, in fact, about half a dozen new rifles that can do that for under \$500, and a couple closer to \$300. As for a scope, there are plenty of excellent used ones around.

My own practice gun is a Ruger Gunsite Scout, and many's the time that I take it to the range with cheap ammo and shoot the hell out of it. Not only is it great practice, but it's great fun. Remember fun?

BULK UP

You can buy cheap 7.62mm and 5.56mm ball ammo in bulk containers of 100 to 200 rounds or more. This is where the real bargains lie. But don't rush out and get one. First, try a 20-round box of one brand at a time to see what shoots well in your rifle. Accuracy requirements are not stringent; anything that puts five shots inside 3 inches at 100 yards is just fine if you're practicing for big game, for which the target's bull should be about 8 inches and the ranges 25 to 200 yards. That said, all the brands I tested performed better than needed, and two tested far better—should you want to make your practice more interesting.

I did my ammo shopping at the local Cabela's and at the Kittery Trading Post, which is an extremely serious gun store down the road, and came up with five 20-round boxes of 7.62 (.308) whose average price was only \$17. At the range, my average 100-yard group for all five brands combined went just a hair over 2 inches, and the best single-brand average group size was 1.254 (see sidebar). This, on a February day so cold I saw dogs frozen to fire hydrants.

When you take into consideration how valuable big-game hunting opportunities are these days, spending some money on a practice rifle and ammo that lets you shoot it affordably is a smart investment.



THE WILD CHEF

WHOLE GRILLED RAINBOW TROUT WITH FINGERLING POTATOES

Cook your limit into a delicious mess of fish, spuds, spring onion *crema*, and—oh yeah—bacon **By Jonathan Miles**



Trout plus bacon is one of civilization's greatest formulas; it always equals pleasure. In this recipe, Atlanta chef and angler Ford Fry compounds the delight by scattering the bacon over smashed fingerling potatoes and adding a cool vegetal note with his spring onion *crema*. This is a dish you want to mess up on the plate—with all those flavors gathered onto a forkful, you're just seconds away from grinning. Fry's tip: Don't neglect to eat the skin. "A lot of people will peel it off," he says, "but trout skin is so thin, and it crisps up so beautifully."

1 Make the crema: Bring a small saucepan of salted water to a boil over medium-high heat. Prepare a small bowl of ice water and have it ready nearby, and a strainer, too. Blanch the parsley and the green parts of the green onions, reserving the white parts for later, in the boiling water for just a few seconds, or until bright green. Strain the water and transfer the onions and parsley to the ice bath. Take the zest and juice of one lemon and place in a blender or food processor. Drain the green onions and parsley and add them to the blender, along with the crème fraîche. Purée until smooth, then salt and pepper to taste.

2 Make the potatoes: Place the potatoes in a medium saucepan and cover just barely with water. Season the water generously with salt and bring to a simmer over medium heat. After the water

evaporates, add three-quarters of the stick of butter to the pan and continue to cook until the potatoes are just tender, about 20 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the potatoes to a sheet pan to cool.

3 In the meantime, cook the bacon in a skillet over medium-low heat until the fat has rendered but the bacon is just shy of crispy. Remove the bacon to a paper towel but reserve the fat in the skillet. When the potatoes have cooled, gently smash them with your palm, just enough to break the skin. Reheat the bacon fat over medium heat with the remaining quarter stick of butter. Add the potatoes and brown them on both sides, about 5 minutes per side. When the potatoes are almost browned, add the reserved white parts of the green onions along with the bacon, stir gently to com-

bine, and remove from the heat. Season with black pepper and cover to keep warm.

4 Make the trout: On a clean work surface, open trout up with skin side down. Generously season the inside with salt and pepper. Slice two of the remaining lemons and shingle the slices inside the trout, using half a lemon per fish. Place two sprigs of thyme atop the lemon slices, then fold up the trout and tie each of them with butcher's twine to keep the lemon inside. Brush the skin with olive oil. Grill the trout over medium heat, about 3 to 4 minutes per side, or until the flesh is firm to the touch.

5 Cut the twine and place each fish on a bed of potatoes. Halve the remaining lemon and squeeze the juice evenly over the trout. Finish with a drizzle of the crema, or serve it on the side. **Serves 4**

INGREDIENTS

4 whole rainbow trout, gutted

½ bunch flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped

1 bunch green onions, roughly chopped, white and green parts separated

4 lemons

½ cup crème fraîche (or sour cream)

1 lb. fingerling or small red potatoes

1 stick butter, divided

6 thick slices bacon, roughly diced

8 sprigs fresh thyme

2 Tbsp. olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

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THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN

NO SURRENDER

When the bite on one of the world's fishiest rivers shuts down, it's best to keep the faith and keep casting **By T. Edward Nickens**

WE'RE PICKING UP a few good fish, rainbows and cutthroat trout with fat bellies and black-peppered flanks. No one's complaining, but we also know the fishing could be better—a lot better. I'm running a double stonefly nymph rig when my guide, Dave Deardorff, scratching a few days of stubble, ponders a pale morning dun hatch that's so light I have to stop casting and squint to see the bugs. "Let's switch things up," Deardorff says. He swaps out the stones for a small Yellow Sally and PMD nymph. My next cast feels spot-on. Hopeful. Sometimes the subtlest shifts can make it happen.

When you're drifting down one of the most revered pieces of trout water on the planet, Idaho's South Fork of the Snake River, it's pretty tough not to fish with high hopes. Framed by grassy, rolling buttes that give way to 700-foot-tall canyon walls, the South Fork carves a twisting football-field-wide course through the western slope of the Rockies. Fly anglers lock down the best South Fork guides a year in advance. There are 6,000 trout per river mile here, with the largest native cutthroat population outside of Yellowstone, which makes every scoreless cast feel a bit like a screwup. I cast up and across, pounding every dark hole and cutbank. Ten casts and nothing.

"Keep at it," Deardorff says.

I cast again and mend the line, managing its drift and my own expectations.

SNAKEBITTEN

I'd scheduled a two-day, 28-mile float to take in the South Fork's wild and roadless canyon stretch, with a bunk at the South Fork Lodge's private canyon campsite. It's a sweet spot shaded by cottonwoods, with cabin tents, woodstoves, and a monstrous fire pit, and overnighting on the river lets us skip the frantic dawn hatch of drift boats at the

Conant Valley ramp. Deardorff and I launch at a civilized 10 A.M., and for the entire first day's float, down some of the most coveted trout water on the planet, we see only two other parties on the river. Hours into the float, though, the fishing stays slow. On a river revered for its dry-fly fishing, the hatches are spotty and sparse, hampered by rain.

Trout fishing has a long register of bucket-list rivers, but fishing an icon like the Snake has its baggage. Famous trout water is trout water nonetheless. It can turn off in a second, or it can never turn on. Any decent angler knows that any day can be a bust, and that there's more to fishing a legendary stream than big fish and big fish numbers. But I'm starting to struggle with a demon that can be-devil any big trip to big-time waters: *What happens when it doesn't happen like you hope?*

By the time Deardorff oars us to our camp, I'm a bit beat down from chunking streamers and nymphs for nearly seven straight hours. Within minutes I have a bracing drink in hand, a steak searing over the fire, and new friends around me. But later in my tent, as I drift toward sleep, the South Fork's purling chorus reminds me of the gulf between the fishing I'd hoped for and the fishing I'd experienced. Try as I might, I can't shake a nagging expectation that lingers just shy of presumption. It's unfair to the fish and the



river, I know, and it robs each moment of its precious, peculiar gifts.

SINGIN' (REELS) IN THE RAIN

A third of the way through the second day's float, basalt cliffs crowd cottonwoods to the water's edge, and the river braids into a half-dozen channels. The skies are bruised and broken, sending out sheets of rain one minute, then thunder and sunlight the next. "This is the mother of all riffles," Deardorff tells me, back-oaring into a deep emerald run that knifes through the gravel. When the first bugs appear, I figure them for fluffs of cottonwood. Deardorff sits bolt upright. "Those are yellow PMDs," he says. "There's a mahogany. See it?"

Within two minutes, the hatches explode. We round a bend in the braid to find legions of mayflies springing from the water. There are bluewing olives, green drakes, and PMDs. The river is frantic, cobbled with the rain but boiling, as well, with trout snouts, fins, and tails. I scramble to tie on flies, my fingers shaking. This is what I'd imagined, but I can't believe it's happening now.

"This is unreal!" Deardorff hollers, as the storm drowns out his voice.

It seems impossible that an insect could hatch and fly in such a downpour, but the bugs won't be denied, and the fish follow. An 18-inch brown clears the water four times before coming to the net. Rain nearly batters my fly into the drink, but in an hour and a half I rise who-knows-how-many fish. I land 11 trout in a 15-minute stretch, with rivers of rain running off my hat brim. One long cast puts my fly a half foot up the riverbank—"the emerging minnow presentation," Deardorff says—but a half breath after the fly goes wet, a 16-inch cutthroat boils underneath. The strike happens so

quickly that the details sharpen only after the fact—a flash of crimson slashes right to left in a dark hole where the fly was floating, and then my rod comes to life.

We get a solid two hours of what the South Fork can be, wrenching brown trout from the grass banks and cutts and rainbows from bubble lines that gyre below the riffles. By the time the bite peters out, we're in the river's slack section, and Deardorff cranks a small outboard to push us home. I lean back in the drift boat, stow the rod, and shake my head with gratitude. I got what I came for, and it was all the sweeter for what I knew in my heart: This time, it was more than I deserved. **FS**

TIP OF THE MONTH



SCRATCH THE SURFACE

Get a jump on a full-blown hatch by learning to identify trout feeding on insects that haven't yet fully turned adult. "When all you see are dorsal fins and tails, and no fish heads," Dave Deardorff explains, "that's a sure sign trout are taking emergers." Throw cripple patterns and emergers tied with sparse materials and CDC. "Once the fish turn on to the duns, you'll see trout stick their whole beaks out of the water." By then you might have landed a trophy already. —T.E.N.

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Q & A

David E. Petzal
answers
your
questions
about guns,
shooting,
hunting,
and life

If you could be transported to any moment in history, what would it be? And what gun would you carry?

—AARON DALTON, MERIDIAN, IDAHO

A: In recorded history? It would be Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, at the moment when the smoke from the cannon bombardment cleared to reveal 13,000 Confederate infantry lined up for a mile, ready to step off into immortality. I would not be carrying a gun. I would be hiding somewhere. If it were non-recorded history, I would love to see what a *T. rex* looked like, and I would see if I could borrow a Barrett M82A1 .50 BMG for the occasion.

Q: If you had to guess, how many guns have you owned, and how many shots have you taken?

—JAMES NOLAN, CARLISLE, PA.

A: This is not just a guess, but a wild guess. I've been shooting on a regular basis for 58 years and probably owned 500 or so firearms over six decades. My present collection,

however, is so small that people burst into tears on seeing it. Rounds of ammunition expended? Hundreds of thousands, at least.

Q: Which is the better choice for deer, the .243 Winchester or 6mm Remington?

—JOHN BIGBIE, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

A: They are so close in performance that there's no practical difference. If you handload, a slight edge goes to the 6mm Remington because it holds slightly more powder and the case necks are not as prone to stretching.

Q: Have you used the new Nosler AccuBond Long Range? The concept seems great, but I can't find a single example of anyone having shot a game animal with this bullet.

—JOHN LIND, ONTARIO, CANADA



ASK PETZAL

A: I've shot the AccuBond Long Range, but not at game. It's very accurate, highly aerodynamic, and probably considerably tougher than most bullets with that kind of ballistic coefficient. Quit worrying and be of good cheer, man, this is Nosler we're talking about.

Q: My friends think I'm crazy for using a .375 H&H on whitetails, but my rounds punch through thickets and knock deer down. Am I nuts?

—COL. MICHAEL A. ABELL,
MOUNT EDEN, KY.

A: You are partly nuts. Nothing punches through the thickets. All bullets, regardless of size, can deflect. Nor does any "round" knock anything down. That said, the .375 H&H has taken every species of animal that poops, and handles deer with the same deadly efficiency it does everything else.

Q: What do you think of using a silencer on a hunting rifle?

—LUC HENRY, RALEIGH, N.C.

A: I think it's an excellent idea. A suppressor (which is the correct name) can save your hearing, which is no small thing in hunting or in life. I wish something had saved mine.

Q: What gives you a thrill?

—KIM PORTMAN,
SAN BERNARDINO, CALIF.

A: My liver quivers hardest when I am able to hit the X-ring on a 600-yard F-Class target, which is only 3 inches in diameter. Seeing the scoring marker rise up out of the pit, indicating that I have hit the bull's-eye dead center, gives me a warm, gooey feeling that I can't seem to obtain elsewhere.



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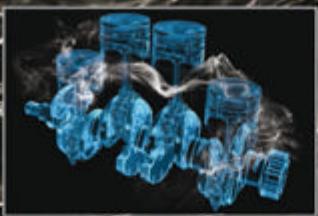
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Propagating salmon, creating new fishermen, and nurturing public wildlife **By Mike Toth**

• *Small Fry*

Anderson and protégés look at young cohos.



THE COHO CULTIVATOR

ERROL ANDERSON, CHEHALIS, WASH.

Every year since 1983, Anderson has reared up to 100,000 coho salmon from eyed eggs and released them into Deep Creek, his home water. He picks up the eggs at a state hatchery and tends to them daily for three months until the salmon grow to 1½ inches. Anderson took over the volunteer effort because he saw that the number of returning salmon had been declining. He has also improved stream habitat and created spawning areas. "I want to see that the creek has fish," says Anderson, 77, a retired logger. He released his three-millionth coho last year.



THE ANGLER MAKER

CAPT. TOMMY LARONGE, BELLEAIR, FLA.

A former foster child, LaRonge and his friend Misty Wells founded a Reel Future, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to take as many foster kids as possible out on the water. To date, the organization has brought 300 kids fishing. "The reward is absolutely amazing," says LaRonge, 42, a charter fishing captain. "I've been not wanted, and I want these kids to know that there are people out there who care."



THE MOJAVE CHAMPION

CLIFF McDONALD, MOJAVE VALLEY, ARIZ.

Since 2005, McDonald has led volunteer work crews to repair hundreds of water guzzlers and water-pumping windmills in California's 1.6-million-acre Mojave National Preserve. McDonald, 66, grew up hunting on the preserve and took his sons on their first hunting trips there. The retired supervisor also successfully lobbied to establish an early two-week youth quail hunting season at Mojave.



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'Eye Candy

There's a Storm Shad pattern to fool just about any fish.



FISHING

STORM TROOPERS

Is the Swim Shad more versatile than a classic bucktail? (Spoiler alert: Yes) **By Joe Cermele**

FOR GENERATIONS, the white bucktail jig has been hailed as the most versatile lure ever. So effective is its ability to catch any fish anywhere, bucktails were once stocked in military-issue survival kits. It wasn't until 2002 when the bucktail first got a run for its money. That's when Storm unveiled its new swimbait, the WildEye Swim Shad. I still remember buying my first pack of Shads...and I still remember the thump of the stripers that whacked one of the baits within 10 casts off a Jersey Shore jetty. Since then I've put up everything from 30-pound striped bass to 2-pound crappies on these soft plastics, and I rarely hit the water—fresh or salt—without a few "Stormies." They are, in my mind, the new-age bucktail. To realize their potency, you need to understand why they work so well, and how they rose to the top at lightning speed.

REVOLUTION SOLUTION

Steve Gibson, a product engineer at Storm, was on the team that developed the Shad. In the years prior to the bait's

release, Gibson noted that the swimbait market was split into two categories: cheap, rigid soft plastics that required an external jighead, and expensive custom baits coming out of California, mainly bought by big-bass fanatics.

"The Storm Shad solved many problems in the early swimbait market," Gibson tells me. "They came prerigged, which allowed anyone of any skill level to use them. The injection-molded baits of that time were largely solid colors, while our baits came in a huge array of patterns and sizes with internal holographic foil that added a subtle flash no one else had. They were also affordable and widely distributed."

Those factors contributed to the bait's early success, but Gibson says the Swim Shad ultimately took off because, quite simply, it caught loads of fish. Not long after the lure hit shelves, Gibson started getting calls from people using the 3- and 4-inch models intended for freshwater to fool giant tarpon. That's when he realized the bait's true versatility. "In no time," he says, "they were in every tackle shop, from the big-boxes to mom-and-pops."



I still remember buying my first pack of Shads...and I still remember the thump of the stripers that whacked one of the baits within 10 casts off a Jersey Shore jetty.

CHEAP THRILLS

The beauty of the Storm Shad is that there is no wrong way to fish one. Rip it, jig it, crawl it, hop it, troll it; even if you do nothing but cast and reel steadily, it'll get crushed. Since the bait's debut, there have been countless imitators. I've always remained a fan of the original, largely because the eyes don't pop out, the hooks are very strong, and I believe the tail kick provides better vibration than others. I've used Shads for everything from bass through the ice to redfish on the flats, but I think they're most lethal in current. Cast a Shad upstream, let it hit the bottom, and reel back with pops of the rod tip. There's nary a small-mouth on the planet that will refuse.

Compared with a bucktail, one could argue that the Storm Shad lacks durability and repairability. A Storm won't last long on a trip for pike or barracuda. If your life depends on it, the bucktail is the lure you'd want in your survival kit, but for the weekend angler who's willing to spend as much as \$20 on one hardbait (and risk losing it), I think Gibson puts it best: "One Shad costs you about a dollar," he says. "If you had more than a dollar's worth of fun with one before you needed to change it, that's a pretty good deal." It's such a good deal that I buy in bulk, because the thought of being in a situation where I need a Shad and don't have one—or have only one that's on its last legs—is too frightening to imagine. 

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ADVENTURES

CREATURES IN THE DARK

This month, an underrated bite heats up in the Northeast. Grab some jigs and watch out for the ink: It's squid season **By C.J. Chivers**

IN THE DIMMING GRAY of an evening in mid May, Luke Ackroyd swung a light-weight casting rod over the gunwale and let a pair of jigs drop through cool water to his quarry below. His was an unusual rig. The lower jig was a teardrop of metal with a pair of eyes painted at the bottom end. The upper jig, tied about 18 inches ahead of the first, was a clear hollow tube resembling a squat mackerel. Neither bore a hook. Instead, both ended with two rows of needlelike steel pins.

We were in an open boat just east of Nebraska Shoal, the underwater plateau a short distance off Rhode Island's sandy southern beaches. The seas were light; the wind barely a breeze; the surface temperature a stubborn 48. A few other boats, spread along the fishing



The squid slid free, let go of my arm, and landed in a bucket of ice. With a noisy squirt, it stained the ice black.

grounds, rose and fell on oceanic swells. Many were brightly lit, giving the mini fleet a carnival air.

We had arrived early. I was sipping a cup of coffee ahead of darkness, which is when the action we sought usually happens. Ackroyd's tandem rig found the bottom in a half-knot tide. He reeled a turn to bring it clear. The jigs stopped. Ackroyd eased back slowly, furrowing his face as if perplexed. His rod stayed slumped. Judging from his reaction, it felt like neither fish nor snag.

"Hey, I think I have one," he said, and began to reel, lifting the weight toward the surface.

Together we peered down into clear green seawater and watched his catch emerge—a squid, about 18 inches long in all, tentacles flailing, fins waving, its head spitting a dark cloud of ink as it

neared the boat. It was trying to swim away in lunges, changing colors as it moved. First it was gray with dark webbing and small blue spots. Then its hues shifted in a wavelike rush. It became brick red with dark streaks. Its spots blazed turquoise.

Ackroyd swung it over the side and into my hands. It was cold. It flashed through color changes again, almost turning black, then a hot purple before settling for the moment on pink. Suction cups on its tentacles found a purchase on the skin of my wrist. I flipped over the jig, turning the pins toward the deck. The squid slid free, let go of my arm, and landed in a bucket of ice. With a noisy squirt, it stained the ice black. A smile lit Ackroyd's face. It was our first trip of the season. We had meat at minute one.

"That was quick," he said, and sent the jigs back down.

Almost instantly his rod arced again.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

Each year, as spring spreads its warmth along the northeastern coast and inshore Atlantic seawater temperatures climb through the 40s toward the 50-degree Fahrenheit mark, masses of longfin squid move from their offshore wintering grounds toward the southern New England coastline. Once they arrive, they can roam as near as the surf, estuaries, bridge pilings, and harbor docks; larger schools frequently hang back a short distance from shore. There they hunt and feed, often over open bottom in less than 30 feet of water. And there they spawn and die, leaving behind a new generation as they close out a brief life cycle and replenish the stock.

Longfin squid, which live from Newfoundland to Venezuela, form an essential building block in the ocean food web and are an important commercial fishery. When dense masses of them venture within easy reach of small-craft anglers, an underappreciated sport fishery unfolds.

Where we live and fish, schools of longfin squid usually turn up on either side of the entrance to Narragansett Bay in May. (Many squidders flock to a well-known bridge in Newport, R.I., dubbed the Calamari Causeway.) We find them reliably at Nebraska Shoal, where they typically spend several weeks during one of the peaks in the species' spawning patterns. Some years they loiter deep into June.

Get past the squeamishness that some people retain for squid, and you will realize you are passing up a delicacy. Our local longfins (and less commonly seen shortfins) are tasty and good for you, and they can be prepared in seemingly endless ways, from grill to skillet, salad bowl to pickling jar, smoker to pasta plate. And they are more than food. We freeze part of our catch for bait, and feed it back to the water through autumn. Cut into strips or even used whole, squid caught in spring yield fluke, scup, black sea bass, striped bass, and bluefish.

The squid run has another welcome attribute: Squidding is best at night. For those of us with day jobs, night fisheries are one of nature's blessings. We can work the day, eat a quick meal, fill a thermos, and be out on the water by 8 or 8:30 P.M. as darkness descends. After

jigging for a few hours, we can reverse the ride and be asleep by midnight—often with a cooler that is heavy with iced meat.

OFF THE HOOK

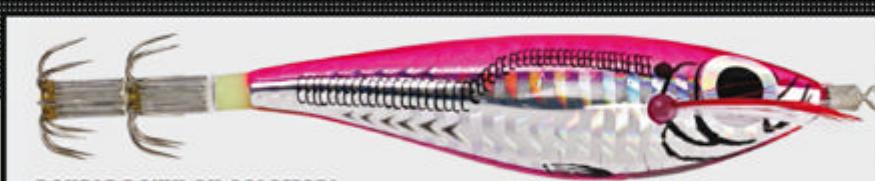
Ackroyd remained busy hauling squid beyond sunset and into the night. We had anchored on a promising spot and switched on four halogen lights, which were pointed at the water from the boat's T-top. This is not an ideal way of drawing bait toward the surface—a submerged light would be much more effective—but it nonetheless attracted a few squid. They passed by, sometimes ghostlike and slowly; other times in fast-moving feeding packs. Those on the surface were a mere distraction. Many more squid remained deeper, out of sight. To find them, we worked jigs near the bottom. When the bite slowed we'd plumb the mid-water depths and connect with more squid there. Ackroyd caught them in singles and pairs; I pitched in with a steady pick. Soon the boat was a mess of dark ink splashes. The buckets were noisy with squirting, writhing squid.

Jigging for squid resembles ordinary vertical jigging, save for the peculiarities of squid jigs, which are hookless. They come in many types and in many different sizes. Some glow in the dark; some are solid metal; others are plastic-bodied and float or sink at a slow rate; a few have small integral lights. They all work, and they share a trait: rows of spiky pins built to take advantage of the feeding habits of squid, which seize prey with their tentacles and pull it toward their beaklike mouth. When a squid reaches for a jig, the angler will usually sense its weight. Pulling back drives the pins into the tentacles. From there the angler simply reels in steadily, being sure to give the squid no slack, which can allow the barbless

pins to slip loose. The trick is to keep the squid moving smoothly and vertically, dragged along by the jig, and to continue the motion fluidly as it clears the water, via a gentle lift and swing that carries the squid into the air and onto the deck or, even better, to a waiting hand.

The last steps can be elusive for new squidders. Gawking at a pinned squid boatside is almost impossible for many to resist, and also a good way to lose a squid. Still, this is not a difficult sport. On weekends, our boat is often packed with my children and their cousins, all of whom learned how to squid by age 8 or 9 and can out-squid the grown-ups—at least as long as they manage to stay awake.

Once a squid comes aboard, it goes immediately into a high-sided bucket of seawater-and-ice slurry. Squid decompose swiftly; on a warm night your delicacy can turn foul in a flash. The slurry bucket has another function, too—it becomes a reservoir of squid ink, which makes cleanup easier later. When the squidding hits lulls, we transfer the squid into bags, and bury these in a cooler with fresh ice, where they await cleaning on land the next sunrise.

On this night, the squid didn't stop. They struck jigs yo-yo near the bottom, and jigs flipped out away from the boat and allowed a gliding free fall. They jumped onto jigs at mid-depths, and chased jigs up into the light, almost to the surface before darting away. Ackroyd and I quit at about 10 P.M., before the squid did, with about 85 fresh longfins, neatly bagged and under the ice. These were fine specimens: With their legs, many exceeded 20 or even 22 inches and weighed well more than a pound. We had roughly 50 pounds when we headed in—enough to make for many days of bait, and to share and feast upon in the weeks ahead. 

GEAR TIP

DOUBLE DOWN ON CALAMARI

How many squid jigs (like the one shown) to use depends on many factors. I often fish with my children and find a tandem rig—a heavy jig at the bottom that holds its place in the tide and a floater swinging free a short distance above—strikes the right balance. It puts a variety of lures and many pins in the water, and yet it does not hijack time by interminably tangling.

—C.J.C.

INSTANT GUIDE

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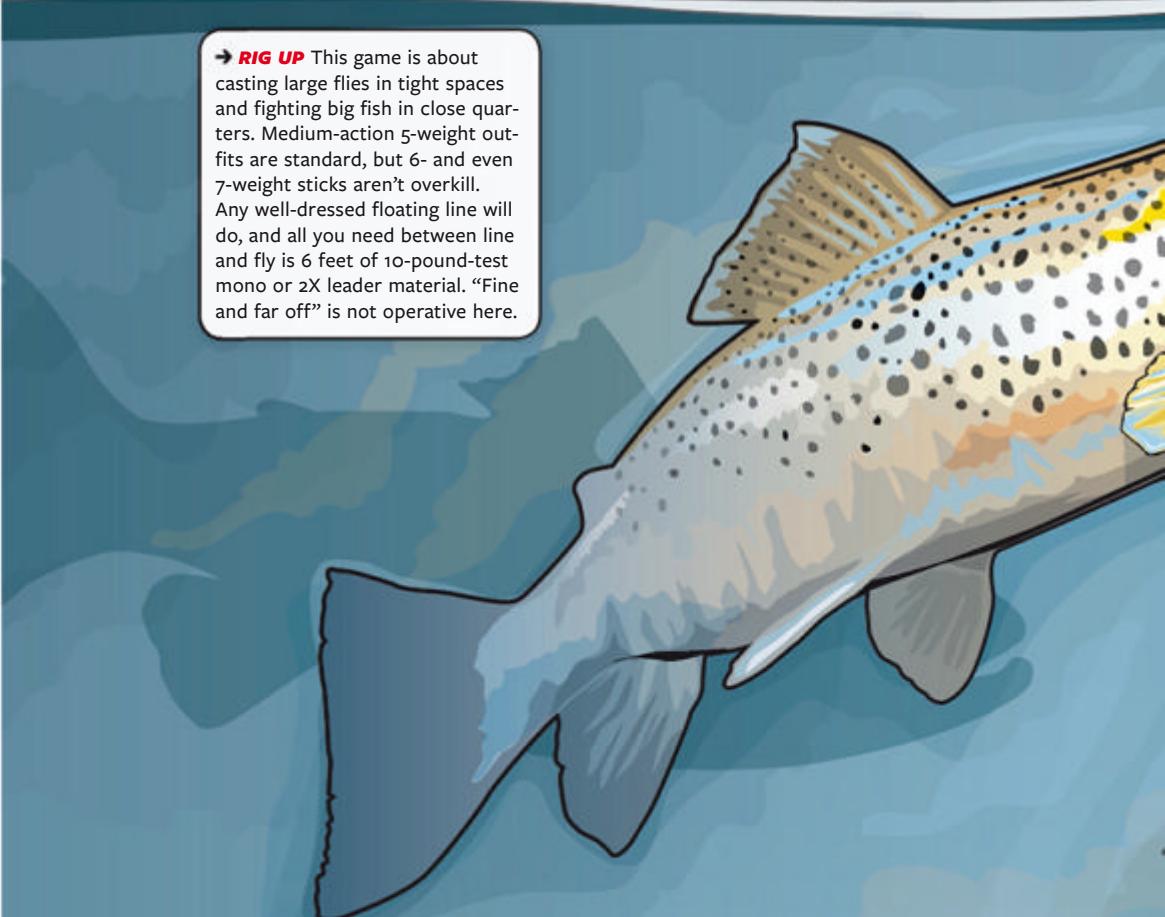
BREAK THE HEX

Become a night stalker to hit heavy browns during the Midwest's biggest, baddest mayfly hatch

By Tom Davis



→ **RIG UP** This game is about casting large flies in tight spaces and fighting big fish in close quarters. Medium-action 5-weight outfits are standard, but 6- and even 7-weight sticks aren't overkill. Any well-dressed floating line will do, and all you need between line and fly is 6 feet of 10-pound-test mono or 2X leader material. "Fine and far off" is not operative here.



Ever see those national reports about clouds of insects so dense they show up on radar and coat entire towns? Those living blizzards are *Hexagenia limbata*, the giant mayfly that hatches at dusk in late spring and early summer throughout the

Midwest. What makes these bugs so special is that they draw huge trout—the ones that spend most of their time hunkered deep—to the surface for a sip. But cashing in on this hatch is no sunny wade in the park. Here's how to stalk the dark of night and score in the swarm.

TIPS,
TRICKS,
AND
ADVICE

NIGHTLY SPECIALS

Battle gear for
blackout browns



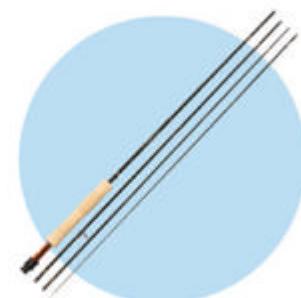
[1] NEALY'S HEX & HEX

POLYBACK EMERGER The rubber-legged Nealy's is irresistible to browns feeding hard on duns, whereas the low-profile Polyback is tops when the hatch slows and the fish become more selective. \$2.75; tightlinesflyshop.com



[2] PETZL TIKKA HEADLAMP

A reliable headlamp is a must for catching a nighttime Hex hatch. This unit is so light and compact, you won't even know you're wearing it, and the high-output LED guarantees you'll find your way back to the truck. \$30; petzl.com



[3] SCOTT RADIAN FLY ROD

Without visual cues to guide your casting, feel becomes all-important—and in my opinion no rod has better feel than the Radian. The 8-foot 6-inch 5-weight is a terrific tool for this big-bug event. \$795; scottflyrod.com

→ **STAKE IN THE MUD** The Hex is a lover of silt, marl, and mucky sand. Look for duns to emerge in the slower sections of streams where a soft bottom predominates. Ideal water temperature is between 65 and 70 degrees, and the hatch typically begins 30 to 40 minutes after sunset. Deep river bends, undercut banks, and woody snags are classic spots; stake them out well ahead of nightfall, and don't forget the DEET.



SKILLS

OUTSIDE THE BOX (CALL)

HAVING TROUBLE WITH
PRESSURED TURKEYS?
TRY A NEW SOUND
> By T. Edward Nickens



Mouth calls, pot calls, and box calls rule the roost with turkey hunters, but they're not the only options for striking up a conversation with Ol' Gob. Hunters in the know tend to keep quiet about the four lesser-known calls here because their effectiveness hinges in part on how rarely toms hear their sweet tones. But when a pressured bird won't cooperate, any one of these can be your ace in the hole.

1. Trumpet

If you can't be bothered to make your own wing-bone call, just buy a trumpet call, which has a similarly soft, organic sound. Trumpet calls are made of exotic woods, metal, or glass and plastics. Like wing-bones, they're blown using a tight, kissing inhalation. Unlike wing-bones, they can produce loud calls that cut through the wind to strike distant birds.

2. Scratch Box

Originally made from match or cigar boxes, this traditional Southern call has been around for a couple of hundred years and specializes in realistic soft talk. A predecessor to the box call, it consists of a small wooden box and a separate striker. One major advantage is that different strikers can be used to produce a wide variety of sounds.

3. Tube

Like a diaphragm call attached to a megaphone, a tube call is simply a piece of latex stretched over a cylinder and held in place with a rubber band. In the right hands, it'll make every wild turkey sound, from gobbles to kee kee runs—and with unmatched volume.

4. Push-button

These boxlike friction calls aren't so much less familiar as they are less used, especially by veterans who disparage them as the choice of newbies. But with the simple push of a striker rod, they put out distinctive clucks, puts, and yelps. Some can be mounted to a shotgun.

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PROJECTS

MAKE THE BED

GET A WHITETAIL TO SLEEP RIGHT NEAR YOUR FOOD PLOTS **> By Scott Bestul**

→ This month, most deer fanatics have food plots on the brain. But planning where fall bucks will eat is only one piece of the puzzle. You can dictate where they'll sleep, too. Bucks look for specific features in a bedding area, and with a little work, you can create ideal spots near the feed for the perfect ambush. Here's how.

1

PICK THE SITE

Bucks like to bed high, so they can spot danger and escape quickly. Any bench or ridge end 400 to 500 yards off the feed is a great spot. But remember, *high* is a relative term here; if your deer bed in lowlands, a dry hump 3 feet taller than anything else is fine.

2

CLEAR THE SPOT

Deer don't like sleeping on rocks or sticks any more than you do. Clear brush and debris in a 4x4-foot area, then flatten that spot with a spade. Some experts lay down straw or haul in sand, which ensures the bed is dry and insulated. Don't laugh; it works.

3

BUILD A WALL

Because bucks like cover behind them, locating the bed in front of a rock face or blowdown makes sense. Even better, hinge-cut a few young trees with a chain saw to form a back wall. The beauty of hinge-cutting is that it keeps the trees alive and your wall lush with cover for years.

4

STEER THE BUCK

Speed-scout to see what existing trails a buck will use to travel to and from his new bed, then either hinge-cut trees or pile brush to block any that are not to your advantage. Now you've not only made the buck's bed; you've steered him toward your top ambush sites.



WET CURED

Use this homemade boot dryer to remedy soggy waders fast

The only thing worse than filling your boot-foot chest waders while fishing or hunting is that cold, squishy feeling the next time you stick your tootsies in there. Try this trick for getting them totally dry between outings.

1

Wring water out of the insoles and inner boot material, then jam dry newspaper into the boots to soak up as much residual moisture as possible.

2

Cut a 4-foot length of 4-inch PVC pipe in half at a 45-degree angle, so that you have a pair of 2-foot-long pipes with one end square and the other angled.

3

Roll the waders inside out so they stand about 2 feet tall. Remove the newspaper. Insert a pipe in each boot, pushing the angled end into the toe.

4

Turn the entire contraption upside down over a floor heat register. The rising air dries the main part of the boot, as the pipe funnels hot air into the recesses of the boot toe.

—T. EDWARD NICKENS



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BAIT SHOP

CATCH A BUG

THREE WAYS TO FILL YOUR BAIT BUCKET—OR STEAMER POT—with LIVE CRAYFISH **By M.D. Johnson**

→ Whether you call them crawdads, crawfish, or mudbugs, crayfish are one of the most lethal bass, catfish, and big-trout baits you can put on a hook. They also happen to taste great steamed with a little Cajun seasoning. Both are terrific reasons to get out and catch some craws. All you need is a set of fast hands, a piece of raw chicken, or an inexpensive trap. Here's what to do.

LIFT-AND-GRAB

Though not very efficient, this method is probably the most fun. Just wade into any flowing, rocky creek, and start lifting stones to find craws underneath.

Stand on the downstream side of the rock and lift toward yourself so the current flushes away the silt. Crayfish swim backward, so attack from the rear, whether using a dip net or your hands. If the latter, scoop with your palms or grab just behind the head.

TRAP

Baited with shad or chicken backs, a crayfish trap (\$11; frabill.com) funnels your quarry into a small opening to feed. Once in, they have a hard time finding their way back out.

Leave traps overnight in slow streams, in shallow still waters, or in eddies within fast streams. To keep captured craws from destroying the bait before more of their friends join the feast, slip the chicken or shad into a nylon stocking before loading the trap.

DIP ▶

Great for slow- or still-water crayfishing, dipping works exactly like the crabbing method that's common on the coast.

Tie a raw chicken leg to a nylon cord, and dip the bait among the rocks, letting it soak for a few minutes. Crayfish will grab hold of the tough skin and stay attached if you lift the bait slowly up off the bottom. Scoop them into a small dip net, but be quick; crayfish usually let go as soon as they break the surface.



FEED THE KNEAD

Hook more fish with a pinch of Play-Doh



Remember the deliciously salty taste of Play-Doh from when you were a kid? Fish love it, too. Here are three ways to put this nontoxic putty to use on a hook.

Trout Neon Play-Doh balls make great salmon egg imitations, but you can also mold a pinch around a fresh mealworm to make it stand out in stained water.

Catfish Cats will eat a hunk of Play-Doh mixed with garlic powder. Packing this mix around your sinker can also lure fish to traditional hook baits as the putty dissolves.

Flounder Hook a minnow, then stick a ball of Play-Doh on the point, covering the barb. It keeps the livie from sliding off, and amps visual appeal. —JOE CERMELE



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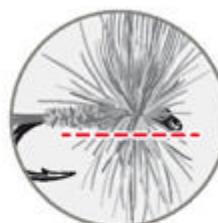
Brown Out
Natural-looking flies fool spooky trout.

TIPS

FIGHTING TRIM

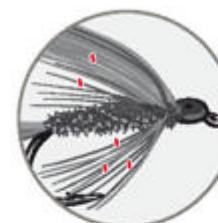
GIVE YOUR FLIES A STREAMSIDE SNIP TO HOOK MORE WARY TROUT **By Will Ryan**

→ We've all been there: trout rising in every direction and not a fly in the box that'll draw a strike. The solution? Carry a small pair of scissors, and when trout get picky, use these three trimming tricks to make your bugs look buggier, and score more hookups.



DRY FLIES

The problem with many dry flies fresh from the shop is that they have too much hackle; no mayfly or caddis I've seen has 80 legs. In hard-fished waters, a low-floating fly tends to be a better producer, particularly in slow pools or during an evening spinner fall. In these situations, try clipping off all the hackle on the underside of the hook shank so the fly floats flush to the surface.



WET FLIES

Wet flies imitate both emergers and drowned adult bugs. The former drifts with its exoskeleton dangling; the latter often looks bedraggled. That's why wet flies tend to catch more fish after they've been chewed up. Hurry that process by clipping the hackle unevenly, wrecking any fresh-from-the-vise symmetry. As a finishing touch, mash the fly into the mud once or twice.



NYMPHS

A real nymph's gills waft and pulse as the bug swims along with the current. To imitate this natural movement more effectively, use the point of your scissors to pick out some of the fur along the side of the fly's abdomen and thorax. This gives your nymph the translucent look of the real thing, as the flared hairs add a touch of movement and create a more natural nymph profile.

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EXPERTS

DEATH BY JUNK FOOD

BLACK BEAR GUIDES SHARE SECRET INGREDIENTS FOR A KILLER BAIT MIX

By Michael R. Shea

→ Everyone knows bears love donuts, but that doesn't mean you need to raid a Dunkin' dumpster for bait. We asked three of North America's top bear outfitters to reveal their single, favorite, easy-to-get bait ingredient, which you can combine at a single site to give bears a permanent bow-range food coma.



INGREDIENT NO. 1 LICORICE SPRITZ

George McQuiston of Wild Idaho Outfitters (wildidahooutfitters.com) swears by a homemade anise concoction for bringing in big bruins. And the data backs him up. Between 2004 and 2007, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources conducted a study on bear attractants and found that the black-licorice aroma of anise extract beat out all others. McQuiston buys anise extract online by the gallon (\$40; escofoods.com) and dilutes it by

70 percent with clean vegetable oil. "I put it in a spray bottle and spritz it while walking through the woods and all around the bait site," he says. "The whole spot will be crawling with bears exclusively from that anise smell."



INGREDIENT NO. 2 POPCORN

Looking for an inexpensive bulk filler, Trevor Kunz of Wyoming's 5K Outfitters (5koutfitters.com) discovered popcorn. "It's cheaper than dog food or grain," says Kunz, who

runs 35 bait sites over a 40-mile area in the rugged Bridger-Teton National Forest. Unlike wheat, oats, or whole corn kernels, popcorn won't fill a bear's stomach for long, so he'll return to the bait site more often. Last season, with four air poppers, he cooked up 50 55-gallon bags of popcorn. This season, he sprung for an industrial popcorn machine.

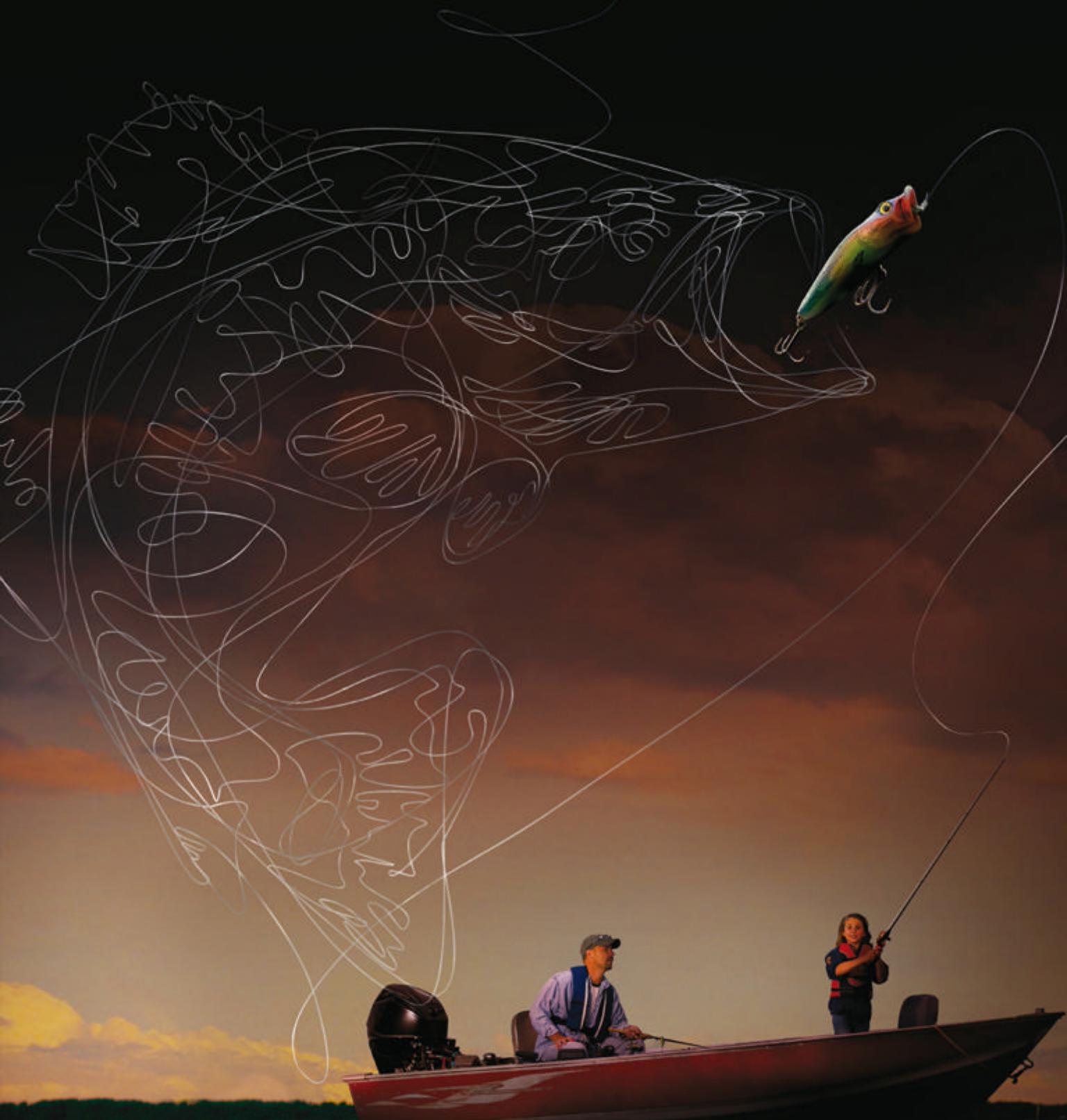


INGREDIENT NO. 3 SUGAR

Kevin Barber of Hunt N It Outfitters (huntnitoutfitters.com) in New Brunswick tops things off with straight sugar. "I can turn any bait into bear cocaine by adding copious amounts of white sugar," says Barber. "It makes even a so-so bait irresistible." At less than 50 cents per pound, pure cane sugar can be bought by the pallet at Costco and most other warehouse stores.

"Bears have a real sweet tooth," Barber says. "That's why so many people lean on donuts and cake, but you can save money and make a more concentrated bait by using the main raw ingredient."

RACHEL SUTHERLAND (FOOD STYLING); ICONS: ARTHUR SHLAIN (LICORICE), JOEY GOLAW (POPCORN), CLAIRE JONES (SUGAR)



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MONSTER WEEKEND

Photograph by Nathaniel Welch



Brownie Points
A 5-plus-pounder is
readied for its
release in a New
Jersey stream.

→ YOU KNOW IT'S THERE, IN YOUR LAKE OR STREAM. THE WALL-HANGER. IT'S THE BIGGEST,
OLDEST, AND SMARTEST FISH IN THE WATER. NO ONE'S EVER CAUGHT IT.
THAT WILL ALL CHANGE IN THE NEXT TWO DAYS

THE MONSTER MANIFESTO

→ BY MIKE TOTH



THROWBACKS. LITTLE GUYS. SHRIMPS. BABIES. DINKS.

There are many terms for small fish, none of them complimentary to your angling ability. They don't fight hard. They draw faint praise from fellow anglers. They look small in photos, no matter how far you extend your arm toward the camera.

This fishing season, you're going to catch a big fish. Not just an average-size fish, or even a "nice

one." The fish you're going to catch will be one of the biggest in the lake or river. Rather than a dream, this will be one of the biggest moments in your fishing history. And it can happen this weekend if you're willing to do four things:

- COMMIT.
- PREPARE.
- FISH HARD.
- FISH HARDER.

Ready? O.K. Let's go catch your trophy.

NO, YOU CAN'T DO THAT. YOU'RE FISHING ALL WEEKEND

Do not make plans to fish both Saturday and Sunday if you might have to take the dog to the vet, fix the truck, get married, help a friend move, etc. Clear your calendar, and let people know that you won't be available for any kind of social obligation. Get your errands done during the week. Or forgo it all and just

	LARGEMOUTH BASS
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Take a Bow
This 5-pounder was pulled from a small Minnesota lake.



LARGEMOUTHS

BY DAVE WOLAK

Leave the little worms and crankbaits home, because a big postspawn largemouth wants a big postspawn meal. Large swimbaits and giant worms are the name of the game—if, that is, you've got the dedication to throw them from sunup to sundown. Here's your battle plan, Icy Hot not included.

FRIDAY EVENING

Prep your tackle now because the action can happen right out of the gate on Saturday morning. Since you're focusing on big bass, limiting your tackle to gear suited only for hawks takes away the temptation to play with the little fish. You want a stout 7-foot 6-inch swimbait rod and a baitcaster loaded with 16-pound fluorocarbon. Make sure your drag is oiled, as it will hopefully be spinning. You also need a 7-foot worming outfit with plenty of

backbone, loaded with 14-pound fluoro.

Fire up your electronics—or grab a paper chart—and figure out a few key areas to hit at first light. What you want to look for is deeper water in close proximity to the shallows where bass spawn. Creek channels that act as highways between shallow and deep water make excellent targets, as do any submerged points near the spawning grounds in 6 to 14 feet of water.

SATURDAY MORNING

In much of the country, the postspawn coincides with the shad spawn. In the early morning, fan-cast a 6- or 8-inch clear-and-gold or pearl paddle-tail swimbait around those deep spots you marked last night. If you don't get bit in the first two hours, roam a little shallower and keep an eye out for flips and dimples from spawning shad around rocky outcrops and riprap points. When you find activity, work your swimbait around the perimeter, as this is where



Open Wide
An Alabama lunker comes to the boat.

the big bass will lie in wait for a wayward shad.

MIDDAY

If you haven't bested a beast by noon, pick up the worm rod, head back to the deep areas where you started, and fish slowly on the bottom with a Texas-rigged 10- to 12-inch ribbon-tail worm in green pumpkin or grape. Feel for subtle differences in the bottom, such as drops, brush, grass, or lone pieces of hard structure. Be sure to alter your retrieve cadence. For example, if you slowly dragged

the worm over a piece of structure on the first retrieve, recast and aggressively pop it over on the second pass. Quite often, a big bass will follow a worm for a while but only eat it when it makes an abrupt movement.

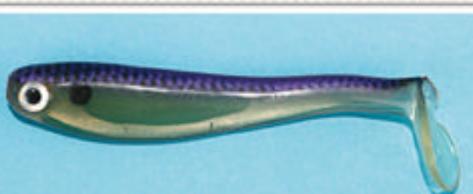
EVENING

Pick up the swimbait rod and stick with it until just after dark. Focus your efforts on points. Those you can clearly see as an extension of land are good, but hidden gems only visible with your electronics are better. Cast across the points and reel quickly. Keep the bait closer to the surface

as the sun sets, allowing it to create a wake. Brace yourself; if you get hit now, it's likely to be a heart-stopping explosion.

If you're hawgless by the time you go to bed, set your alarm for zero-dark-thirty and go rogue on Sunday. Don't stray too far from those deep areas near spawning grounds, but try throwing the big stuff around key pieces of shoreline structure where you'd normally throw a smaller spinnerbait later in the season. If you move or catch a smaller bass, back up and work the same area a little farther offshore. Your tank could be hanging on the edge of the brat pack.

ESSENTIAL LURE



★ Basstrix Paddle Tail, 6-inch: Fan-cast swimbaits that mimic shad, which spawn during the largemouth postspawn. Target deep spots near shallows.



accept the fact that you're leaving your home life for a while. Casting to a bed of lily pads at sunset, just when a 10-pound largemouth has decided to cruise up from the depths and demolish that pesky Pop-R on the surface, is no time to be worried about making an overdue credit-card payment. You'll miss the hookset, and you'll still owe the late fee.

Similarly, don't enter into this with the underlying belief that you'll catch a monster by noon, and don't tell your significant other that you might be back that evening so you can go out to dinner and then watch *The Notebook* while wearing matching Snuggies. Admit to that and you'll find yourself driving home by lunchtime for a shower and a nap. You won't be back until after sunset. O.K.?

Yes, take your cellphone with you. No, don't turn it on to catch a score or check texts. Only hit that power button when you're ready to take some selfies with that giant you just netted.

GET YOUR TACKLE READY AND RIGHT

You finally have a wall-hanger on the line. Your line peels out. Your heart starts hammering. The fish jumps and you see it for the first time. It's unbelievably big and beautiful and powerful. This is the one.

And then your line goes disgustingly limp and slack. You reel and reel, hoping, praying. *Please, be swimming toward me!*

But you know. Gone.

Plenty of large, powerful fish that would otherwise have wound up at the taxidermist are still swimming because someone's improved clinch looked "close enough." You can't do anything about the hidden deadfall treetop that the lake-

**YOU'RE GOING TO
CATCH A BIG FISH...ONE
OF THE BIGGEST IN THE
LAKE OR RIVER.**



Great Catch
A Lake Superior smallie surrenders.

SMALLMOUTHS

BY WILL RYAN

For the biggest smallmouths, those over 5 pounds, the time is now. Full of eggs and hungry, the belly-draggers can't eat enough, quickly enough. There's no waiting—not for you, either.

FRIDAY EVENING

Get depth charts of the lake you intend to fish. Prepare medium or medium-light spinning rigs spooled with 8- or 10-pound-test fluorocarbon and jigheads ranging from $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ ounce so you can fish different depths in different winds and currents.

Study the map and circle flats in 5 to 15 feet of water. Smallmouths spawn in these areas when

the water reaches 60 degrees. The closer the water is to that mark, the closer you want to be.

Scanning out from the spawning flats, note the adjacent deep water (20 to 40 feet). Pinpoint, in particular, the breaklines—there may be one at 10, for example, on the edge of the spawning flat, and another that runs from 15 to 20 and creates a transition zone, before a hard break that falls to 30 to 40 feet. If spring has been cold, mark nearby shallow bays that enjoy a long fetch with a southern wind. Identify several areas with these elements: flats, deeper staging water, nearby warming bays. Pick one area for a start.

MORNING

The opportunity for a prespawn trophy is not ex-

actly a state secret, so be on the water at sunup. The largest smallmouths are the first to shy from boat traffic, but they are also the most aggressive. Make sure the first bait they see is yours.

Weather will dictate your opening strategy. A warm morning with water in the 50s will bring bass over the hump onto the 5- to 15-foot flats. (The flat must have a gravel bottom to be a spawning area.) Position the boat outside this skinny water and cast right to the edge with lightly weighted tubes in golden shiner, smoky shiner, chartreuse pepper, or dark melon orange copper (for crayfish). No interest? Try a weightless, wacky-rigged 5-inch Senko in watermelon, pumpkin, or smoke.

Then move to deeper water. With wind from the

Hand Off
A Mississippi River hawg gets released.



south and water in the mid 50s, stay closer to the flat in the 10- to 15-foot depths; if it's cold with a north or east wind, move deeper and slow down the presentation. Use as light a jig-head as possible and keep in touch with the bottom. Fish as slowly as patience permits and be ready for subtle strikes. Sometimes the take of the biggest fish feels like nothing more than growing pressure, often coming as the tube rests on the bottom.

The same technique can be used in clear water to fish floating poppers, such as a Yo-Zuri 3DB, which makes maximum noise with minimum movement. My friend Stan Warner often fishes two rods, one with a floating popper, the other with a tube. He sets down one rod, picks up the other to make a twitch or pop,

waits a minute, then switches again. He gets some of his biggest smallmouths in 45-degree water with the popper resting unattended.

MIDDAY

In late morning, with the sun on the water, move closer to the edge, drifting through the 10- to 15-foot range, casting free-falling weightless, wacky-rigged Senkos or tube jigs, swimming (rather than dragging) them. If a spring sun pushes the water into the mid 50s, use more aggressive horizontal presentations. A suspending jerkbait such as a Smithwick Suspending Rattlin' Rogue in silver-and-gold lets you fish the slope up to the spawning area. Shallow-running (4 to 6 feet) white Cotton Cordell Big O crankbaits are real killers,

with their combination of vibration and visibility.

If you don't have your trophy by afternoon, try one of three strategies: Zip over to some nearby warming bays and drift the 10- to 20-foot depths with tubes; pull up stakes and hit a new staging-bay-and-flat complex; or if you're marking fish or are otherwise convinced you're in the right area, troll a lipped

crankbait or a Rapala along breaklines. Go with the crankbait in 10 to 20 feet, and the Rapala in 5 to 10 feet. As with all prespawn lures, use natural, muted baitfish and crayfish colors in clear water, and hot colors in stained water.

LATE AFTERNOON

Visit the transition zone to make your final casts of

the day with a tube jig on the outside edges, fishing first the 20-foot break, then the 15, and then the lip of the flat.

Repeat the ritual on Sunday—especially your late-afternoon strategy. With boat traffic waning quickly and putting big smallmouths on the prowl, it just might be the spot and time for the bass of your life.

ESSENTIAL LURE



★ **Tender Tube, 3½-inch:** On warm mornings, work a lightly weighted tube over 5- to 15-foot flats with a gravel bottom.

record largemouth burrows into, but you can change that fluorocarbon leader after it tangles around your lower unit. You can replace last year's line, or at least cut off several feet to eliminate weak spots.

You can sharpen your hooks. A hook hone is one of the cheapest and most useful pieces of tackle around, yet it is one of the least utilized. Sure, factory hooks are sharper than ever, but a lure that has bounced around in a plastic compartment and then scraped against boat hulls and gritty bottoms has lost penetration ability.

You can bring a landing net, and keep it where you can reach it with one hand. Swinging a heavy fish onto shore or over the side of the boat is a risky experiment in physics that can

result in a loud splash and much cursing. Likewise, feeling the heft of a big fish in your net for the first time is impossible if the net is in your car trunk, as I found when I tried and failed to lip a smallmouth that was well past the 20-inch mark, ripping the hook out in the process.

You can patch your waders, tune up your outboard, lube your reels, and bring a backup rod and reel. A spare outfit kept me kayak fishing, and led to my biggest summer flounder ever, when my primary reel suddenly seized up after too many saltwater drenchings.

BE A TROPHY FISHERMAN, NOT A GUY WHO'S JUST OUT FISHING

There's more to trophy fishing than knowing the best lure to use. It's a holistic endeavor, and there's nothing New Age about it. A serious trophy angler won't:

- Stay up late the night before, watching TV and arranging empties in artful

THERE'S MORE TO TROPHY FISHING THAN KNOWING THE BEST LURE TO USE.



WALLEYES

BY ROSS ROBERTSON

Walleyes are a finicky species, and big walleyes—10 pounds and bigger—are even more difficult to predict. In order to bamboozle a trophy walleye in spring and the approaching summer, you need to follow a very specific strategy.

FRIDAY EVENING

A call to a bait shop this evening is the first and best intel you can get. Ask them when they open on Saturday and how the guys did today. Ask about how deep the walleyes are, water clarity, general locations, and how they've been caught. Compare what you've learned with what you're seeing in online forums or websites about tournaments.

If you don't feel that you've gotten enough good info, check lake and river maps for deep basins in close proximity to spawning grounds. Typically this translates to large rivers or reef complexes and the deep mud-flats that are nearby. Post-spawn walleyes will use these areas to rest and feed before heading to their summering grounds.

You'll begin tomorrow by trolling, so prepare line-counter reels and planer boards tonight. Hot baits vary from lake to lake, but large deep-diving crankbaits are capable of working from the top of the water column all the way to 30 feet. The Reef Runner 800 series is a mainstay for trophy hunters regardless of the lake; choose transparent finishes (such as Bare Naked) for clean water and white (Mooneye Minnow) patterns in stained or off-color water. Another prime weapon is a large-bladed spinner rig

ESSENTIAL LURE



★ **Reef Runner 800 Series:** Big deep-diving crankbaits are proven baits for trophy walleyes. Troll clear colors in clean lakes.

trolled behind bead-chain sinkers or snap weights. Start with a selection of No. 6 and No. 8 Colorado and Indiana blades. The bigger the lake, the bigger the blades you should be using; and usually the bigger the blades, the bigger the fish. Experiment with size and color frequently.

SATURDAY MORNING

You don't need to be the first boat on the lake. The water warms up several degrees as the sun rises, and fish tend to bite better as the day goes on. Visit the bait shop in the morning for some last-minute intel. Lacking specific info, start trolling a deep-diving crankbait around shoals, reef edges, and tight contours that offer quick access to deep water. Once you find how walleyes are relating to these features, the pattern will be the same in other parts of the lake.

MIDDAY

Even if you haven't hooked a heavyweight yet, you should at least have a feel for whether the type of water you're fishing is productive. If it's not, you may need to relocate. When the water temperature is above 45 degrees, tie on spinner rigs and fish them from shallow to deep. Use chain swivels and planer boards to help spread the lines out both above and below the water to improve your chances of dialing in a pattern.

EVENING

If you still haven't managed to figure out the fish by now, move your lures drastically high or low in the water column to see if you missed something. Meanwhile, put a game plan together for Sunday. See if other boats on the lake are all over a particular depth or structure, or working mudlines, clear water pockets, or dirty patches.

SUNDAY

After a successful Saturday, go back to what worked and try to fine-tune the pattern. Note lure preferences, productive depths, whether strikes came on turns. If you caught a lot of smaller fish, make changes. Slow down your trolling speed, because big walleyes generally won't chase as much as the smaller ones. Trophy walleyes often will be schooled near but not mixed in with smaller walleyes, so look deeper or shallower from where you've caught the little guys. If Saturday was a bust, do some research and make adjustments. Online forums and fishing-club websites post Saturday tournament results promptly, so you can see if it was a tough day for everyone or if you weren't on the right pattern or place. Don't be afraid to hit new water if you aren't getting the results you want. You'll get your trophy.

'Eye on the Prize
Ross Robertson raises
a Lake Erie beast.





patterns on the coffee table.

- Hit the snooze button half a dozen times the next morning.
- Hunt around for his tackle 10 minutes before he leaves for the water, and then...
- Learn that he's low on hooks, bait, lures, sunscreen, dip, bug repellent, drinking water, and/or food when he finally does get there.

Get that gear ready, gas up the truck, and hit the sack. Make sure your fishing partner, if you have one, does the same. The only thing worse than driving back home because you forgot your tackle bag is driving back to your buddy's place because he forgot his.

When you do get on the water, don't just slip into default mode and cast to promising spots. Pay attention to conditions and adjust accordingly. Subtle increase in wind speed? Maybe you should try a windward shoreline, where bait is getting trapped. High water? Look for

CARELESS FISHING RARELY LEADS TO TROPHIES.

areas that are newly flooded, which attract fish. Does a certain insect or baitfish species seem prevalent? Try imitating it, in size if not in color. All of this may sound routine and simplistic, but it's surprising how many fishermen will stick with one lure, tactic, or location simply because it produced once before, even if that happened during the first Reagan administration.

Careless fishing rarely leads to trophies. Don't walk right up to what seems to be a good stretch of water—approach it subtly and fish the outer edges first, where a big fish may be patrolling. I spooked one of the biggest stream brown trout I ever saw as I sloppily stumbled down the bank of a central Pennsylvania trout river

Have a Cow
A New Jersey striped
bass goes back into the salt.



STRIPERS

BY JOE CERMELE

Early summer. You're on a family getaway somewhere from Delaware to Cape Cod. You know the drill: kids covered in sand, overpriced dinners, miniature golf. But if you choose your sneak-away times carefully, you'll have a shot at a 40-plus-pound stripers from the beach with minimal effort. While the spring migration is just wrapping up in the southern part of its range, you'll be in the thick of it here. Follow this plan to hook into a trophy.

FRIDAY EVENING

Spend some time before dinner walking the beach, looking for a trough in the surf. Watch the way the waves break: If a roller crests, breaks, then flattens again before rebreaking at your feet, you know it encountered deep water. That middle zone is the sweet spot. Mark it and go free up the next two mornings and evenings.

SATURDAY PREDAWN

Head to a bait shop for fresh bunker. Make sure the flesh is firm—when you push your finger into the bunker's side, it shouldn't leave an indentation—and the eyes aren't

ESSENTIAL LURE



★ **Bomber Long A:** Bring an extra rod to the beach, so while your bait soaks you can fire lures and work them through deep troughs in the surf.

sunken in. Store them in zip-seal bags in your cooler, because contact with freshwater will make the fish mushy. If bunker aren't available, opt for the freshest seasonal big bait—surf clams, live eels, whole squid, or mackerel.

SATURDAY MORNING

Return to your pre-scouted trough and send out baits on fishfinder rigs, which allow your pyramid sinkers to slide on the line. Big bait catches big fish, so don't be afraid to use an entire bunker or mackerel head or midsection. Large circle hooks, such as a size 10/0, ensure better hook-ups when rods are left in sand spikes. Change baits every 20 minutes, and fish the entire morning tide. If you don't connect by noon, go build sand castles with the kids.

SATURDAY EVENING

Return to the trough just before dark and cast out a fresh bait. Spike the

rod closer to the surfline, and while it soaks, use your second rod to work a black Bomber Long A through the deep spot. Just remember to look over your shoulder at the bait rod frequently; adding a strike-indicator bell or glow stick can be helpful.

SUNDAY

With time running out, don't sit on baits again right away. Get up before the sun rises and cover as much water as possible with large lures such as pencil poppers and metal-lip swimmers. Focus on troughs and any breaks between sandbars. Keep a sharp eye out for diving birds or bait schools swimming close to the beach. If you still come up empty, give some fresh baits one last soak in a likely trough from evening into the first few hours of dark. Statistically speaking, letting shoreline-cruising bass come to you is often a better bet than searching for them.

TROUT

BY KIRK DEETER

 You want a real, wild trophy trout on the fly—not some pellet-fed, planted, triploid mutant (anyone can get that photo). Your fish has eaten and survived its way to the top of the river food chain, the hard way. So you'd better have your act dialed in.

FRIDAY EVENING

■ Be on the Internet scouting for “happy” water. All rivers are not created equal, and they change character every day. Very specific criteria will identify the prime hunting grounds. You need water temps that are between 45 and 60 degrees and flow levels that are strong and stable, or falling slowly, not rising. You want good water clarity, but not gin-clear. Don’t rely on hatch or catch reports from the fly shop. You don’t want promo talk—you want the real scoop that can produce a player. Get on some local message boards, see what people who have really been out there have to say, then check the latest water conditions (start at waterwatch.usgs.gov).

SATURDAY MORNING

■ You’re up before dark. You’re already rigged when you get to the river: 5- or 6-weight rod, disc-drag reel, floating fly line, 2X tippet, and a box of meaty streamers. You’ve already tied on a tan or white Sculpzilla. If the water is a tad dirty, it’s a brown or black conehead Woolly Bugger.

Your best chance of slaying the dragon will happen within your first 20 casts on the first morning, and your odds go down 5 percent with every



Sweet Release
A 24-inch Montana brown makes a splash.

cast you make. Because that first cast matters so much, you need to figure out exactly where to make it. So: Where would you live if you were a 7-year-old, 30-inch brown trout?

Pin it down by identifying all four of these major change elements in one place: changes in depth, in structure, in current, and in water color. If you find a green-to-brown pool with rocks and/or logs at the head, a good sweeping current around the edge, and a pool that you wouldn’t dare wade into, you’re there.

Invest the first 20 minutes of daylight by watching the run from the bank. When you’re gunning for trophy trout, you never cast into water you haven’t watched first. Look for a wake or a head that will help you home in on the fish. If you see nothing, your first cast should be a gentle flop, an upstream mend of the line to sink the fly, followed by an almost dead drift, right through the heart of the run. Give that fly a jig action (but not much more) as it bounces along the bottom. If the line so much as stops, gently set the hook. With every ensuing cast, add more life and action to the

fly. Make cast No. 20 a full-on bank banger, with fast even strips. Add extra time between casts when you trophy fish. Don’t flog the water—you’ll never beat a mondo trout into submission. Wait five minutes between every cast. After 20 casts, with no results, move to the next best run.

MIDDAY

■ If nothing happens in the morning, you’re faced with a conundrum. You want to keep covering water, but you don’t want to burn good runs. At this time of year, spend the brightest parts of the day working riffle water and edges with a dry-dropper rig. Match the local hatch in both regards (with a dry-fly pattern and corre-

sponding nymph). But don’t burn yourself out: Take a nap, eat lunch, wait for a hatch to happen—and if it does, pounce. The biggest trout will eat cripple patterns in the film on the edges of runs. Follow the bubble lines.

EVENING

■ It’s time to tune in to the hatch game. Really big trout give up bugs as the mainstay of their diets once they grow over 18 to 20 inches long. But some hatches still draw them out, and you want to at least give yourself a chance if that monster shows itself. Remember the prime holding spots in certain runs, and when the rings start happening, don’t pick your way

through the run. Drop the fly in position A right away. If there’s a *Hexagenia* or drake hatch going on, send pinpoint casts into the mix, spaced a few minutes apart, for as long as you’re seeing the soup boil.

When it quits, you quit. Tie on a mouse fly and wait till well after sunset. Go straight back to the target-rich run you fished at daybreak. Cast the mouse fly against the bank, and give it an erratic twitch-strip straight through the heart of the black water. Kill the headlamp to avoid spooking that big predator, and work from memory. Any fish that whacks a mouse after the protein platter of the evening hatch is an absolute glutton.

SUNDAY

■ Repeat the process, but slow everything down even more. If nothing you saw on Saturday gave you good reason for hope, get back on the Internet that night and search for another river. Make the move if you feel so inclined. Follow this same pattern from daybreak to after sunset, and remember that sometimes the biggest trout comes on your very last cast.

ESSENTIAL FLY



★ Sculpzilla: Truly monster brown trout are very efficient eaters. Rather than take insect after insect during a hatch, they consume one meaty meal.

early one morning. If I'd paused to scan the water from a distance, I would at least have had a shot at him, instead of simply watching his breathtaking iris-size spots wink away into the depths.

KEEP CASTING

You shouldn't expect to catch a trophy immediately, or after a few hours, or even after the first day. It's fishing, after all. Look on that time spent not as a failure but as a learning experience, which you can apply to the rest of the weekend.

If you get tired after several hours of fishing, take a break. Beach the boat, put down the rod, have some coffee and a snack. The time you'll miss on the water will be more than made up for by the renewed energy and enthusiasm you'll have when you pick up the rod again.

Finally, always trust your intuition. It's widely believed that primitive man had a strongly developed sixth sense that helped him hunt animals and defend against raiding enemies, and that this faculty, vestigial as it may be, still exists in us.

On a fishing trip to northern Ontario many years ago, I found a short stretch of the Albany River in late afternoon that, at first, didn't appear different from the dozen others I'd fished that day—but there was something about the texture of the water there that got my caveman neurons firing. I worked a small white-winged streamer through the deep run, and when the rest of my crew found me and said that they wanted to go back to camp, I dawdled, making a few last casts while they stood on the bank and groused. A minute later my rod doubled, the reel spun, and everyone started shouting. That brookie is still the biggest trout I've ever caught. **FS**



CHAIN PICKEREL

BY JOE CERMELE

Little pickerel are a dime a dozen and easy to catch, but you want the big dog, and that takes a little more planning. Whether you're camped out on the pond or live close to a soggy, boggy area, here's a scheme that will lead you to the biggest predator in that dark water.

FRIDAY EVENING

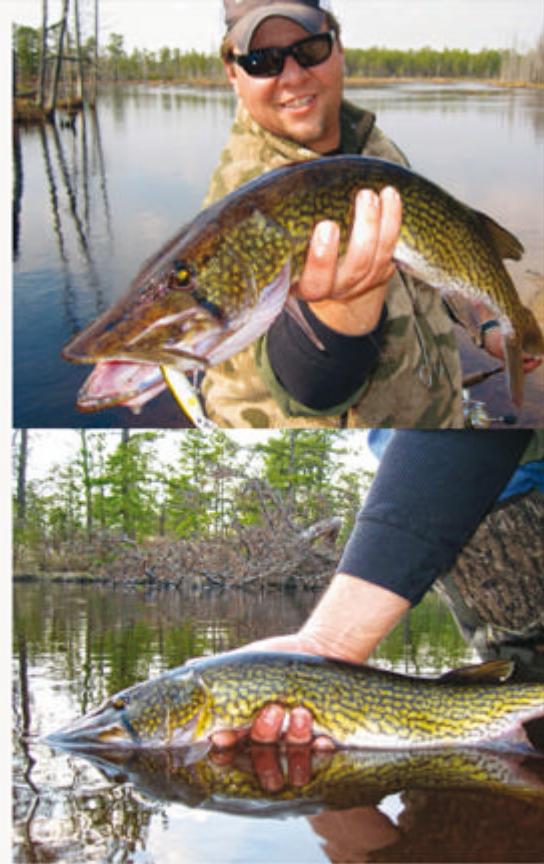
Prep some 3- to 5-inch floating stickbaits, such as the Rapala Slashbait, by replacing their tail trebles with single Siwash hooks. If you want to get fancy, dress those hooks with a little white bucktail or flash material. Getting rid of one treble will make hook removal much easier.

SATURDAY MORNING

Big pickerel often hold in deeper water but within easy reach of shallow flats where baitfish and bluegills congregate. Scout for old creek channels in ponds or bogs. Note any structure, such as weeds or stumps on the channel edge, as well as its proximity to shallow water or lily-pad fields. Cast into the deep water and work your stickbait back with erratic jerks and long pauses.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

If you weren't able to draw out a big fish with lures, rig a 3- or 4-inch shiner under a float, setting the depth so it hovers just off the bottom in the deeper lanes. Pickerel are more likely to attack shallow at low light, so when the sun gets high, live bait fished deep is usually the better strategy.



Chain Gang

Cermele shows off two nice pickerel caught in the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

SATURDAY EVENING

As the sun sets, trophy pickerel start hunting aggressively. Tie on a 3½-inch Super Spook Jr. and work it parallel to weed edges, stumps, or deadfalls in shallow water that's close to the depths. If a fish tracks but doesn't commit, speed up your retrieve.

SUNDAY

Still haven't landed a monster? Rig a 4-inch white Zoom Fluke weedless on a wide-gap hook. Cast to the edge where shallow water meets deep

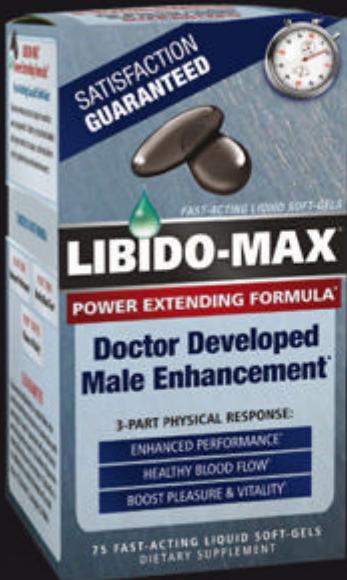
and let the soft plastic flutter to the bottom. Let it lie still for a few seconds before giving it a subtle twitch. This mimics a dying baitfish that a big pickerel won't have to work hard to chase. If temps were cool overnight, this can be the best approach for sluggish fish. In the evening, swing for the fences. Spend the afternoon catching a few small bluegills. Poke one eye out of the bait to make it swim in a circle, and live-line it on the edge of the deep water. **FS**

ESSENTIAL LURE



★ **Rapala Slashbait:** Look for deep spots that are close to shallows where baitfish hold. Cast into the deep end, then retrieve the lure erratically.

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WARNING PRODUCT SAFETY RECALL

Remington is voluntarily recalling Remington Model 887™ shotguns manufactured from December 1, 2013 through November 24, 2014.

Remington has determined that in some Remington Model 887™ shotguns manufactured between December 1, 2013 and November 24, 2014 the firing pin may bind in the forward position within the bolt, which can result in an unintentional discharge when chambering a live round. This may occur when the safety mechanism is on. Any unintentional discharge has the potential to cause injury or death. Therefore, Remington is voluntarily recalling ALL potentially affected products to inspect and repair.

HAZARD: If your shotgun was manufactured in the aforementioned time period, you should stop using your shotgun immediately due to the risk of unintentional discharge. To determine if your Model 887™ shotgun is affected by this recall, visit 887recall.remington.com/.

HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOUR SHOTGUN IS SUBJECT TO THE RECALL

Identify the serial number (located on the bottom of the receiver, forward of the loading port,) and provide it to Remington's recall support team, either by entering it at 887recall.remington.com or calling 1-800-243-9700 (Prompt #3 then Prompt #2) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EDT. You will be asked to provide your name, address, telephone number, and shotgun(s) serial number.

Remington will send you boxes and written instructions, and arrange for pick-up of your shotgun(s). Remington will cover all related shipping, inspection, and repair charges. Please do not return your shotgun on your own. Remington will arrange for pick-up of your Model 887™.

Remington is committed to ensuring the inspection, repair, and return of any affected shotgun.

DO NOT attempt to diagnose or repair recalled shotguns.

TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RECALL PROGRAM

Visit 887recall.remington.com or call 1-800-243-9700 (Prompt #3 then Prompt #2) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EDT. You will be asked to provide your name, address, telephone number, and shotgun(s) serial number.

SAFETY FIRST: Always follow the Ten Commandments of Firearm safety whenever you handle any firearm. Visit Remington.com for more information.

Remington is deeply sorry for this inconvenience, but we believe in safety first. It is imperative that Model 887 shotguns subject to this recall are not used until they have been inspected and repaired by Remington.

The Remington team is committed to the quality and safety of its products.

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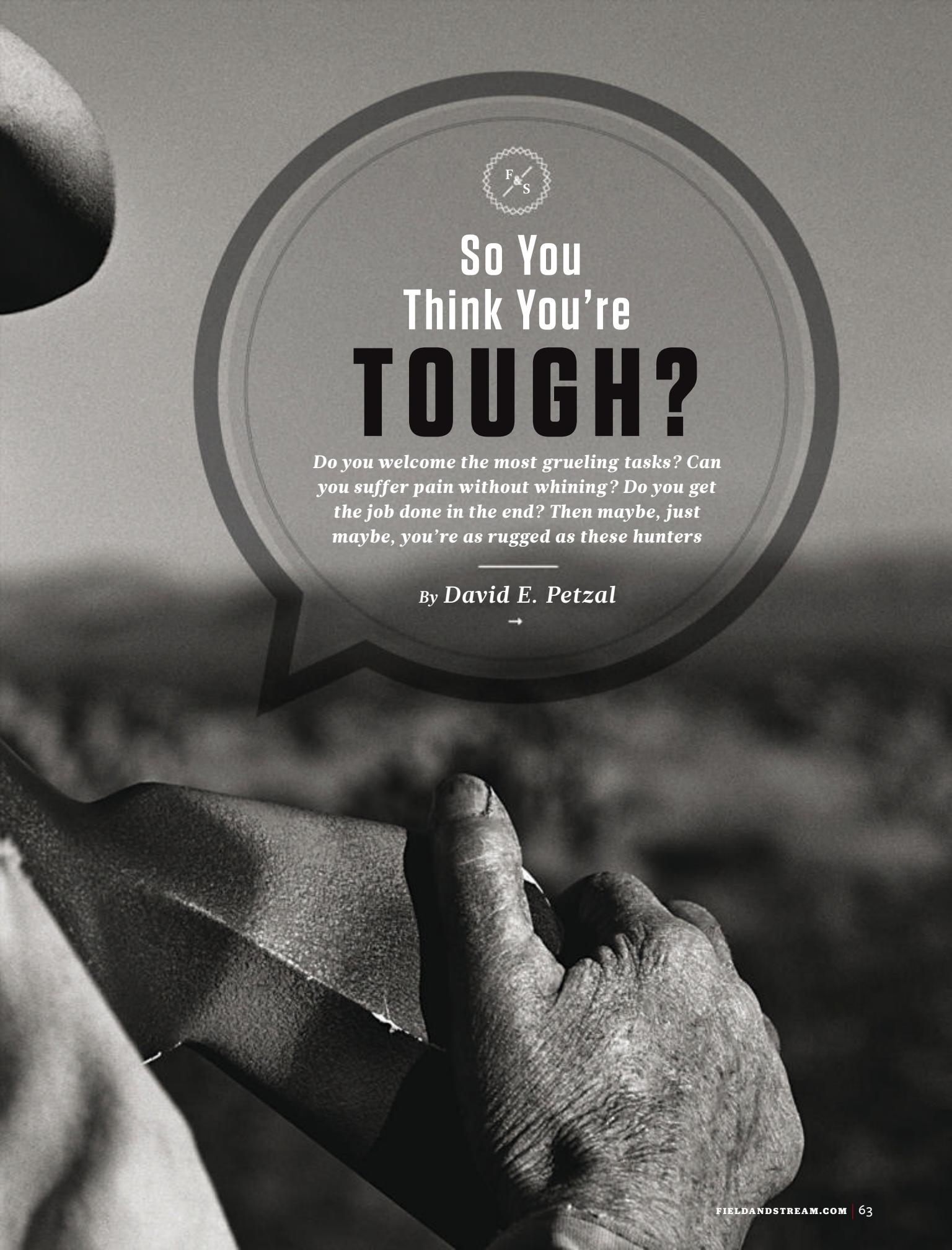




So You Think You're **TOUGH?**

Do you welcome the most grueling tasks? Can you suffer pain without whining? Do you get the job done in the end? Then maybe, just maybe, you're as rugged as these hunters

By David E. Petzal



11



Toughness comes in different forms. Ms. Ronda Rousey of the UFC represents one type; I wouldn't fight Ms. Rousey if they let me use a gun. But that's not what I'm talking about here.

As I acquired experience as a hunter, I began to see that not only were you expected to be observant, persistent, able to control your seething emotions, and possessed of a whole slew of arcane skills, but you were also expected to be tough.

LOAD UP

The simplest form of toughness is physical. In 2006 I hunted Alaska moose with a lodge owner named Charles Allen and a Canadian guide named James Minnery. Charles was in his mid 50s at the time; I was in my mid 60s; and we faced a difficult hunt in sucking-bog country. We wore chest waders because we were in water from our ankles to our necks all day long, and because James was only 30, we let him do all the hard work.

James was 6 feet tall and 180 pounds, and the damnedest combination of strength and endurance I've ever seen personally. Did we need our skiff pulled off a sandbar? James got into the water and gave a great heave, and off we went. Did we need someone to climb 50 feet up a pine tree a dozen times a day and look for moose? James was our boy. Did we need someone to lug the heavy pack, the 50-pounder? *Here you go, James.* And he did it all with no effort. Charles just shrugged and said, "James is an animal."

On the last day of the hunt, when I had finally shot a moose, James carried 70 pounds of meat through a mile of knee-deep mud so gluey that I didn't think I would make it out alive, and all I carried was my rifle. You had to pull one leg free, throw it ahead of you, and then

wrestle the other leg out of the muck, by which time the first leg was stuck again. James went by me like a freight train and was not even breathing hard when we finished our death march. I was breathing plenty hard.

James was tough.

In Canada, I hunted caribou with a Montagnais Indian named Maurice Boisvin. Maurice had learned to use a tumpline pack when he was 10 years old and could carry the boned meat from a caribou as well as the head and antlers and assorted camp gear, a load that probably went 150 pounds. Using just the head-strap, hands on the shoulder straps for balance, he would go skipping o'er bog and tundra at a pace you could not equal.

I once put on his pack and found that I could stand, but I could not move. You could have dropped a venomous serpent into my boot, and I would not have gone anywhere.

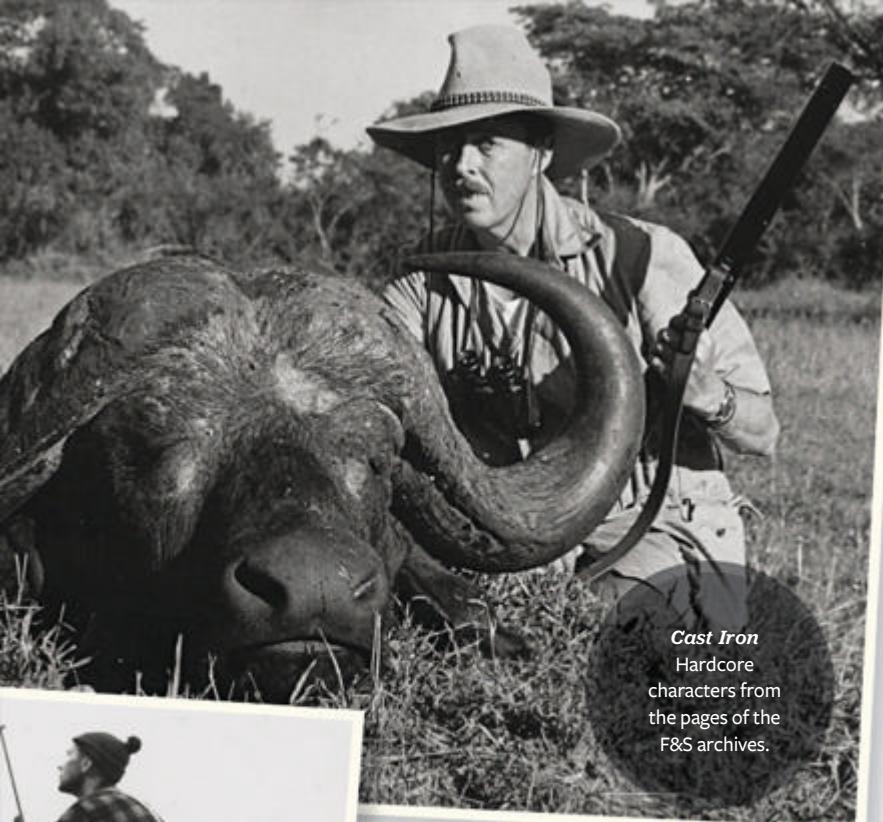
Maurice had a brother named Henri who was lean and rangy and who, on a bet, shouldered a pack loaded with the meat of two caribou that scaled something like 350 pounds, and walked away with it for 100 yards.

Maurice and Henri were tough.

In Zambia, I hunted with a PH named John Knowles whose head tracker was named Shemu. On a



**HENRI
SHOULDERED
A PACK
LOADED
WITH THE
MEAT OF
TWO CARIBOU
AND WALKED
AWAY WITH IT.**



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previous hunt, Knowles's client had killed a magnificent lion, but after skinning it they found that Knowles's Land Rover wouldn't start, and that they would have to walk back to camp, a 25-mile trek. If they left the lion head and cape, hyenas would tear it to pieces, so the client asked Shemu if he could carry the bloody burden. Shemu said yes, he could. A good-size male lion weighs 450 pounds. Let's say that the raw head and hide weighed 100 pounds and change. **That is what Shemu threw on his back and somehow carried all the way to camp, where he became a very well-to-do tracker.**

Shemu was tough.

NO WHINING

Sometimes *tough* means being able to take it. I hunted Cape buffalo in Zimbabwe in 2005 with a friend named John Torborg, who is about my age and wasn't in the best of health at the time. Collecting a Cape buffalo often involves running, trotting, walking, crawling, and standing motionless for long, painful stretches. You do all this from sunup to sundown. It can be a very good workout for someone who is young and in shape, never mind for a man in late middle age.

I noticed that John was limping but wrote it off to general infirmity until we got back to our hut at dark. He took off his boot and presented a big toe that was swollen to the size of a woman's fist and a livid red, highlighted with streaks of purple and blue. How he managed to stand on the dreadful digit, much less put in a full day at the Buffalo Olympics, was beyond me. He never said another word about it.

John was tough.

In Botswana, for reasons too sordid to go into, I put

PREVIOUS SPREAD: TOM FOWLKES



a curse on a knife and loaned it to a tracker named Tlaki, who proceeded to nearly sever the first joint of the middle finger on his left hand. Tlaki stood up with his finger pumping blood, its tip hanging on by a shred of skin.

All he said was "Oh," in a tone you or I would use on acquiring a splinter. The PH drove Tlaki many miles to a missionary clinic where the fingertip was sewn back on. He, too, never said another word.

Tlaki was tough.

GET IT DONE

Sometimes, toughness by itself is useless. Once upon a time in Montana, I knew a young man whom I shall call Percy, because damned few Montanans are named Percy. Percy was then in his late teens and possessed of unlimited energy. He had a cast-iron heart, bronze lungs, and legs of whalebone and spring steel. He could traverse mountains like they didn't exist. If you needed someone to run 15 miles through fallen timber in hip-deep snow, Percy could.

But when he came upon a deer or an elk, his whole nervous system rebelled. It was as though he was jabbed with a cattle prod. Usually, he'd drop his rifle, search for it frantically, spend a couple of minutes clearing the snow off the scope and out of the bore, and then, if whatever he was trying to shoot had not cleared out, he'd yank the trigger and miss, because he was also a lousy shot.

Percy was tough, but it didn't help him much.

Other times, toughness is precisely what gets it done. In South Carolina there lives a fellow named Cecil, although that is not his real name, and when I hunted with him he was one of those young men who make you wonder how the North ever won the War of Southern Overreach. He was tough. Hoo boy, was he tough, and strong as an ox, to boot.

Cecil was a bowhunter, and one day he was waiting on a big platform stand when he saw antlers begin to emerge from below him. They were very good antlers, undoubtedly attached to a very good deer. So Cecil did the smart thing: he came to full draw and waited, because those deer are clued in about stands, and about what happens to whitetails that don't pay attention to sounds and movements above them.

But the deer did not take the next step. And up above, bow at full draw, Cecil began to shake and tremble from the effort. When it seemed that Cecil could not last another second, the deer finally stepped into the open. But just as he was about to shoot, Cecil noticed with horror that there was a second, much bigger buck under the stand, weighing whether to follow the first.

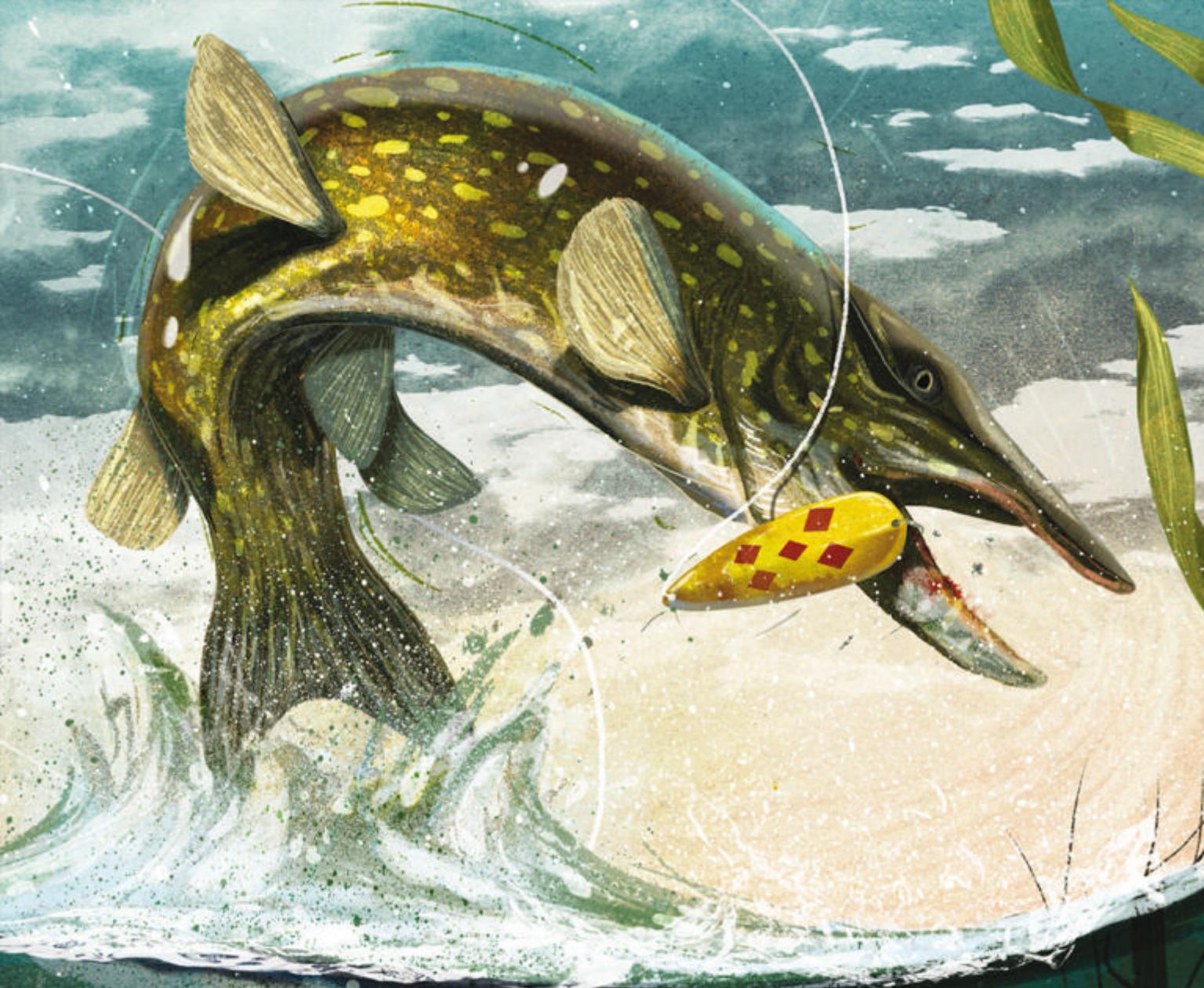
Now in greater agony than Lee at Appomattox, Cecil held his draw, breath wheezing, muscles shaking as with the ague. Finally the second deer moved, the arrow flew, and the shot was good. And then Cecil did the only thing he was able to do after suffering so hard for so long—he had himself a good cry.

But he was still tough.



CRASH Chu

FOUR DAYS, NEARLY 1,000 PIKE, TWENTY-NINE 40-PLUS-INCHERS,
AND EIGHT CRITICAL LESSONS ABOUT SCORING
MORE AND BIGGER NORTHERNS WHEREVER YOU FISH



RSE

*By JOE CERMELE
Illustration by JONATHAN BARTLETT*

IN

FAR NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN, Cree River Lodge provides access to more than 200 square miles of some of the world's most unspoiled pike waters. Last season, three other writers and I got to fish this pike paradise for four days. Within 15 minutes of the first morning, we had a 42-inch beast on the line. By the last evening, using both fly and conventional gear, our group had boated nearly a thousand pike. Twenty-nine of them topped 40 inches. ¶ The action was off the charts, and insanely fun. But it was also an education. I witnessed a volume of pike behavior that a Lower 48 pike hunter might not see in several seasons. Patterns that could take years to unravel on pressured water unfolded within hours. In short, I got a crash course in pike fishing—and took away eight key lessons about what works and what doesn't when it comes to putting more and bigger pike in the net.



a

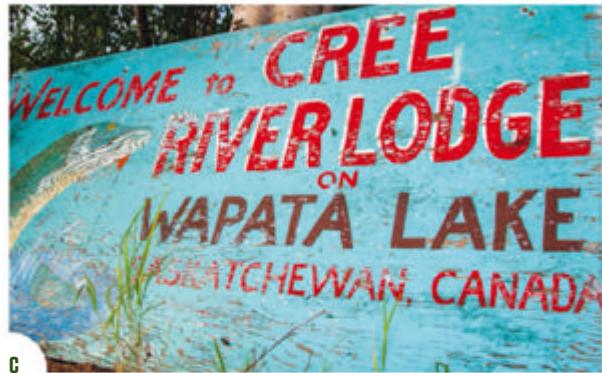


TATTER TALES

- What's left of the author's most productive big-pike fly.



b



c

LESSON #1

BIGGER LURES DON'T NECESSARILY MEAN BIGGER FISH

In fact, the biggest pike we caught on a fly—a 46-incher—took a 6-inch Flashtail Whistler, which is considerably smaller and thinner in profile than most of the other patterns we threw. The longest pike of the trip, which measured 48 inches, hit a 4-inch spoon, despite our throwing



[a] The author in mid-cast with guide Pat Babcock; [b] fried-pike shore lunch; [c] the original lodge sign; [d] the author with a fly-caught 40-incher; [e] releasing a 48-incher; [f] the best light show in town; [g] a curious onlooker.



e

f

g

LESSON #2

IF YOU'RE CATCHING SMALL PIKE, STAY PUT

Lodge owner and guide Pat Babcock was adamant about sticking to spots with an abundance of 12- to 15-inch fish because, he said, heavy pike love to chow down on the babies. And he was right on the money. Almost all of our 40-plus-inchers came from locations where we had to pick through lots of little guys. Conversely, there were several spots where we couldn't keep 30- to 36-inch pike off the line. We thought it was great, but Babcock wanted to leave. He said fish in that size class outcompete true trophies for food, so we weren't likely to find a 40-plus fish in the mix, and sure enough, we never did.

LESSON #3

LURE OR FLY ACTION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN COLOR

A lot more. We found that while pike would attack any color of lure or fly that hit the water, those that maintained some movement during the pause caught more and bigger fish. Jointed streamers and flies with wide, cone-shaped bucktail heads produced best, because when paused, they would flutter or jackknife, allowing the material to pulsate. With conventional gear, spoons outfished all other lures, and most hits came during the pause, when the spoon would flutter toward the bottom. →

some that were larger. Jumbo flies measuring up to 14 inches didn't score a single fish over 40 inches, although they did pound loads of pike in the 32- to 36-inch range. In the end, hooking slob fish seemed to be less about fly or lure size and more about fish mood. If a big pike is on the feed and your offering gets in his face, he's apt to smoke it, and he's not only as likely to grab a 6-inch bait as a 12-incher but maybe more so.



[h] Babcock and Brad Fenson with a 46-inch northern; [i] the business end; [j] bite marks on a 36-inch's back.

LESSON #4

TROPHY PIKE ARE SMARTER

Given that we were fishing for some of the most unpressured pike on the planet, I can say with confidence that trophy-size fish are in a league of their own when it comes to avoiding the hook.

On the first day, our group caught 13 pike over 40 inches with little effort. For the next three days, bites from fish that size were fewer and farther between. We had follows from huge fish. We'd see them ghost up under our flies and lures. But they wouldn't commit like before. It showed us that the biggest pike were far more in tune with subtle changes in weather, temperature, or pressure than smaller fish, which ate all day, every day, with abandon, seemingly unaffected by the slight fluctuations that got the monsters wary or off the feed.

LESSON #5

TOPWATER LURES AREN'T TOPS FOR PIKE

Blown away by the number of active pike, we couldn't tie on poppers and sliders fast enough. But as soon as we started working the surface, the number of strikes plummeted. We tried topwaters in various water types and under a range of conditions. The biggest pike we

WATCH THE FILM



- To see how intense the pike action gets in this *Esox* mecca, check out the *Hook Shots* episode at fieldandstream.com/pike-paradise. Cree River Lodge hosts anglers from May through mid September, and while many think of June as the traditional big-pike month, Pat Babcock recommends visiting in late summer. Water temperatures remain cool and the fish have fattened back up after the spawn. For more information, go to cree-riverlodge.ca. —J.C.



could muster went maybe 24 inches. This doesn't mean you should never work the surface. But if we couldn't raise good numbers of fish to topwaters in pike paradise, you should probably save yours for when you see fish waking and swirling. Don't make them your first choice.

LESSON #6

KEEP THE ROD TIP LOW—AND THE HOOK SHARP

Conventional wisdom says you should always strip-set when trying to hook pike or muskies on the fly, and it certainly doesn't hurt. But what we found most critical wasn't so much the set as making sure to keep the rod tip low to the water, or even submerged a few inches, on the retrieve. Most pike piled on so hard that the low rod angle made them hook themselves, and we could lift the rod immediately after the strike. Sharp hooks helped in this department, too. When hits were subtler, or the fish bit and swam at us, it then became necessary to jab the fish with a strip-set. But this, too, only worked well if the rod tip was low to begin with.

LESSON #7

FLUOROCARBON LEADERS WORK BETTER FOR PRESSURED FISH—EVEN IF ONLY SLIGHTLY PRESSURED

Despite the water's clarity, Cree River pike showed no signs of being wire-shy, which was no surprise given how little they are fished. But here's the proof that even slight pressure makes a big difference: Our guides noted that for fishing off the lodge docks—which see more fishing effort than the surrounding water, but still less than many Lower 48 lakes—switching to fluorocarbon can be the ticket on sunny days. It's often the same group of pike hanging around, and they do get wise to a wire leader.

LESSON #8

IF A GIANT PIKE T-BONES THE SMALL ONE YOU'RE REELING IN, STAY CALM AND APPLY STEADY PRESSURE

This happened to us three times. All the big pike has to do to get free is open its mouth, so there's no surefire method for landing the monster. But you can put the odds in your favor by using gentle rod pressure to inch the fish toward the boat—so that it hardly realizes it's being pulled. The net man should have the bag half submerged in advance, so you can steer the pike right to the hoop. It's still a long shot; we missed two of our three chances. But it can be done, because we did put one 40-plus-inch pike in the boat this way. **FS**

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FISHING Handbook

CUTTING-EDGE STRATEGY FOR THE FISHING FANATIC



KEITH SUTTON

Fish Fresh Seafood

Bait up with saltwater grass shrimp to catch a trio of freshwater trophies

By Jimmy Fee

Big Handful •
A 2-pound
bluegill taken in
North Carolina.

**School's Out**

Yellow perch are easy to chum into a frenzy with grass shrimp.



Common along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, grass shrimp are go-to baits for catching a variety of inshore saltwater species. What many anglers don't realize, however, is how potent these inch-long crustaceans are in freshwater. Whether you seine your own shrimp, buy them live or frozen from a bait shop, or order dried ones online, they'll help you score more jumbo panfish, smallmouths, and trout.

PANFISH

Sunnies, perch, and crappies make a living by plucking tiny aquatic insects from and just below the surface film. To them, a grass shrimp looks like the mother of all nymphs, and it will get devoured in a flash. Many savvy panfishermen swear that live grass shrimp are deadlier on huge bluegills than the freshest pet-shop crickets. Add shrimp to microjigs, or pin three or four on a size 8 Aberdeen hook 8 inches below a float.

**BROWN-BAG FEAST**

Chumming with grass shrimp can create an instant feeding frenzy. To get the chow line started, put a rock in a brown paper lunch bag, add grass shrimp, then tie the top off with a length of cord. Drop the bag to the bottom, wait a few seconds, and give the cord a sharp tug before slowly pulling the bag back up to the surface. The rock will break through the bottom of the bag, and the shrimp will be distributed through the water column, creating a vertical chum line. Just be sure to check local regulations first. —J.F.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Aquatic invertebrates make up a large percentage of a smallmouth's diet, too, so it's no surprise that a big bronzeback will climb all over a shrimp. In New England—where grass shrimp have been a secret smallie bait for generations—impressive numbers of 4- and 5-pounders fall to these sleeper baits every season. Crimp a split shot or two 18 inches above a size 4 baitholder hook. Then slide as many grass shrimp onto the shank as will fit, hooking each just once through the abdomen.

TROUT

Still-water trout—especially big browns—rarely pass up a grass shrimp. Whether they confuse the saltwater bait for a supersized scud or an aquatic insect doesn't really matter. For the best presentation, use a casting bubble. When filled with water, it lets you cast a light shrimp far, where it will sink slowly through the water column like a natural aquatic insect. Rig the bubble 24 inches above one or two grass shrimp threaded on a size 8 gold baitholder hook. If your line twitches as the rig falls, set fast, because trout can easily yank delicate shrimp off the hook.



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**• Pull Your Weight**

Peter Skidmore rows Duck Johnson on the Missouri River in Montana.

**SKILLS**

Catch the Drift

Row like a pro—and hook more trout—with these expert oar-handling tips

By Ben Duchesney

You may be able to paddle a rowboat around a pond, but maneuvering a drift boat on a swift, boulder-strewn river is a different game—one worth learning if you're serious about reaching more trout. Besides steering safely downriver, you've got to put your anglers in the best position to catch fish. Here's how the pros row with the flow and get into more hogs along the way.

1 PUT SOME BACK INTO IT

Point the bow downstream and row backward, says Ben Scribner, owner of Flycraft USA. "My oars are always in the water, and I'm constantly applying pressure against the current, which stabilizes the boat." A stable casting platform is the first step in helping your casters make the best presentations, but you also need to be constantly looking at what's ahead downstream of your position, reading the water and anticipating where the boat needs to be. "I try to give my anglers a downstream reach cast at a 45-degree angle. It gives them longer drifts, and a better angle for a hookset," Scribner says.

2 MAKE THE BANK SHOTS

Matt Kelley of ClackaCraft tries to keep his drift boat 20 to 40 feet from the bank. This distance gets most casters within easy reach of the soft spots where the biggest trout hold. "It helps to focus on two points along the bank, such as a bush and a rock or a big tree," says Kelley. One should be close, the other a little farther downstream. "Use these as points of reference to maintain a consistent distance from the bank." (The specific objects change, of course, as you drift.) "Also keep an eye on the anglers' casts to make sure you're staying within their range. If they're struggling to hit the prime spots, readjust."

3 BRING UP THE REAR

"Remember that the angler in the back has to contend with more obstacles—like oars and anchor davits—than the caster in the front," says Dan "Rooster" Leavens of Montana's Stonefly Inn & Outfitters. "That and the fact that he has to hit water already worked by the bow angler makes me try a little harder to get him in as good a position as I can." Many rowers have a habit of pointing the bow into shore, but this makes the rear angler have to cast farther. "I keep the better angler in the bow," says Leavens. "The team will put up more fish this way, and the stern angler will learn by watching good casts, drifts, and hooksets."

HAVE A CHILLGASM



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Red Alert
A drum's poor vision is an asset to anglers.

TIPS

Hit the Drum

Think inside the box when you're sight-fishing reds **By Joe Cermelé**

JEFF EDVALDS/IMAGES ON THE WILDSIDE

Redfish have an exceptional sense of smell, but their eyesight isn't too keen. That's why these aggressive feeders will take a shot at almost anything that gets close and resembles food; they've got to grab a meal while they can see it. Use this behavior to your advantage when sight-fishing reds. As soon as you spot a fish, draw an imaginary 2x2-foot box around its head from the gill plates forward, extending past the nose. That box is your casting target. Regardless of fly pattern or lure color, if your offering twitches through the money zone, it will get eaten most of the time. **ES**

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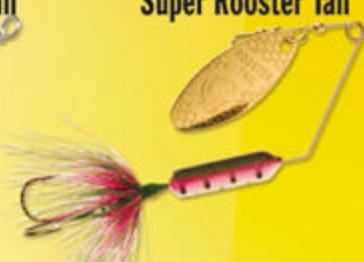


PHOTO CONTEST

SPECIES COUNT



68

VIEW
HERE:



36

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GEAR

Tie One On

Build a leader that saves money and beats muskies

By Mark Modoski

Most of today's serious muskie hunters have swapped yesterday's steel leaders for fluorocarbon, because its low visibility brings more strikes and its tough material withstands muskie chompers. You can buy pre-tied fluorocarbon leaders, but they aren't cheap. So make your own instead. Here's my recipe, which will save you a few bucks and possibly the heartache of a refusal.

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GET THE GOOD STUFF

Forget bargain-basement terminal tackle. Start with a quality No. 1 AFW Mighty-Mini Crane barrel swivel. For snaps, I prefer a No. 4.5 Stay-Lok, which is rated to 250 pounds and connects easily to any style of lure. My fluorocarbon of choice is 130-pound Hi-Seas because it's super-stiff and reasonably priced.

MAKE THE CONNECTIONS

For a 12- to 14-inch finished leader, start with a 24-inch piece of fluorocarbon and simply tie one end to the swivel, the other to the snap. Keep in mind, though, that Palomar and cinch knots are nearly impossible to tie with such heavy line. I use what's called a Centauri knot, which is very easy to learn. You can also use crimps to make the connections, in which case you can start with an 18- to 20-inch piece of fluoro.

PULL IT TIGHT

To make sure your knots or crimps are tight and strong, hold the barrel swivel by the ring with one pair of needle-nose pliers and the bend of the snap with another pair. Give the leader a good pull. If you opted for knots instead of crimps, add a drop of superglue to each connection for added security. After all, why take chances when you may get only one shot at a beast?



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a smart design.

SHELL GAME

Top new 2015 wading jackets do battle on Oregon's raw winter steel-head rivers (and in a bathroom shower) to determine which fishes best in the foulest weather

By Ted Leeson

FIELD & STREAM

Photographs by TRAVIS RATHBONE



FIELDANDSTREAM.COM | 71

With pelting rains, swirling gusts, and pushes of steelhead, Oregon's coastal rivers in winter make an ideal test facility for evaluating waterproof-breathable wading jackets. Every aspect of the garment—from shell fabric to hood, cuff, and pocket design—gets a workout. I recently rounded up five jackets new for 2015, and spent seven days with my southern hemisphere immersed in cold water and my northern one exposed to the wind and wet, assessing jacket performance as I tried to entice steelhead to a fly. My score: almost a thousand casts, four grabs, two small cutthroats, and one chromer landed. Fortunately, the jackets made a better showing. Here's the upshot.



THE TEST

Even in Oregon there's not a full-blown deluge every day, so I first wore each jacket in the bathroom shower—angling the head to simulate a driving downpour—to check watertightness, hood protection, and water-resistance of pocket closures. Then I took each jacket into the field to gauge breathability, the mobility afforded when casting and rowing, and the effectiveness of cuff closures against water seepage. To measure overall performance, I gave up to 20 points each for weather protection, breathability, mobility, functionality, and quality of construction, for a total maximum score of 100. —T.L.

1

Best of the Test
2

Best Value

SIMMS G4 PRO JACKET \$550; SIMMSFISHING.COM

TOTAL SCORE 94

SPECS Three-layer shell with Gore-Tex membrane • 23 oz. (for size L) • 11 pockets

HITS Hood design effectively balances extreme-weather coverage with good peripheral vision. A fleece-lined, tunnel-style neck zips right up to your nose, shielding chin and throat whether the hood is up or down.

MISSES Sleeves could be cut a bit fuller for layering; cord locks on hood can be clumsy to operate with wet hands.

THE BOTTOM LINE Superior wind and rain protection in a smart design that's exceptionally angler-friendly: From built-in retractors to pit zips to the hideaway fly patch, this jacket is tricked out with real-deal features, not bogus eye candy. Nine storage pockets—four of them sized for the largest fly boxes—allow all but the most gear-intensive anglers to dispense with a pack or vest and fish right from the jacket, which increases comfort, convenience, and mobility. It can be a little warm for summer temperatures, but it's still practical for four-season service. This 2015 F&S Best of the Best winner is a total package—and had better be for the price.

L.L. BEAN GORE-TEX PACLITE STOWAWAY WADING JACKET \$199; LLBEAN.COM

TOTAL SCORE 90

SPECS Two-layer shell with Gore-Tex membrane • 15 oz. • 4 pockets

HITS Gusseted, rubberized cuffs seal well and don't chafe. Two large fly-box pockets, vertically oriented and placed close to the main zipper, don't interfere with casting or rowing.

MISSES The hood is somewhat small and can feel restrictive when cinched. Sleeves would profit from more articulation and longer length to prevent cuffs from riding up the wrists as you fish.

THE BOTTOM LINE This is the lightest, most supple jacket in the test. It compresses to a bundle slightly larger than a softball—highly practical for travel or tucking into a vest or pack for those just-in-case days. It's low on special features, but with fly-box and handwarmer pockets, it does cover the basics. Extremely breathable, it's a superb hot-weather rain jacket. For brush busting or winter wear, however, it puts a comparatively thin barrier between you and sharp branches, cold rain, or frigid wind. But there's room for layers underneath, and with a solidly functional design executed in quality materials, you get a lot for your money here.

3

ORVIS SONIC TAILWATERS JACKET
\$298; [ORVIS.COM](#)

TOTAL SCORE 87

SPECS Four-layer shell with waterproof-breathable coating and membrane • 22 oz. • 5 pockets

HITS Capacious exterior pockets have extra-long zipper tracks, making it easy to stow and remove even the largest fly boxes. The clean, uncluttered front has no corners, edges, or tabs to grab brush or loose line.

MISSES Fully zipped, the collar is barely chin-high; it could provide better protection. Unarticulated sleeves hamper arm mobility and can cause cuffs to ride up when casting.

THE BOTTOM LINE A few basic features are the focus here, chosen for utility and generally well executed, including big pockets and an easily adjustable hood with good coverage. Your money goes mainly to the shell. Its low-bulk, sonically welded seams are strong and contribute to good flexibility, especially for the four-layer midweight fabric. Breathability is good, though not outstanding; this one can be a bit warm in summer conditions. Nonetheless, it offers solid rain protection that's practical for year-round wear. And the one-piece, cape-style shoulder design eliminates seams beneath pack straps for increased comfort and durability.

4

EDDIE BAUER IMMERSION WADING JACKET
\$349; [EDDIEBAUER.COM](#)

TOTAL SCORE 82

SPECS Three-layer shell with waterproof-breathable coating • 28 oz. • 6 pockets

HITS It is amply cut for cold-weather layering. Shoulder design and good sleeve articulation allow freedom of motion when casting or reaching.

MISSES The two exterior cargo pockets won't accept large fly boxes. Cuff material is waterproof, but the facing fabric can get saturated and hold water against your skin. The hood's cord locks are cumbersome to adjust with cold hands.

THE BOTTOM LINE The Cordura chassis is sturdy and abrasion-resistant; it stands up to harsh weather and hard use yet is cleanly designed to eliminate snag points with fly lines. And it's stout enough to deflect branches and vegetation when you're navigating the pucker-brush. While the interior mesh stash pockets and fleece-lined handwarmers are useful, in general the jacket is not strong on fishing-specific conveniences that one might expect in this price range; the small exterior pockets are particularly puzzling. In the end, the Immersion is durable, reliable, and gets the job done but is not long on performance details.

5

STORMR FUSION JACKET
\$260; [STORMRUSA.COM](#)

TOTAL SCORE 79

SPECS Two-and-a-half-layer shell with waterproof-breathable membrane and high-stretch neoprene • 34 oz. • 8 pockets

HITS Neoprene inner cuffs minimize water entry, seal tightly against wind, and provide excellent wrist mobility. Three interior mesh pockets supply extra storage capacity.

MISSES The wide neck opening can let in wind and rain. Also, water can seep through where the neoprene cuffs mount to the sleeves, especially if wrists are submerged.

THE BOTTOM LINE This innovative shell's high-stretch neoprene panels on the articulated sleeves and back minimize binding and create lots of comfortable give when you move. It is the heaviest jacket in the group, and with a full lining and the insulating qualities of neoprene, the warmest. But some of the materials reduce moisture movement through the shell, making the Fusion best suited to colder temperatures and to fishing that doesn't involve high levels of exertion. So while hike-in anglers will want more breathability, this one filled the bill for my winter steelheading and had enough pocket storage to hold a fair amount of tackle.

BARGAIN SHOPPER

TACKLE BAGS FOR UNDER \$30

Can a simple, inexpensive satchel hold the lures you need and stand up to hard use? We tested four to find out **By Mark Modoski**



BASS PRO SHOPS FREESTYLE 370 SATCHEL BAG
\$19.97; BASSPRO.COM

BARGAIN RATING Excellent

SPECS Size: 18" x 8" x 5 1/2" • Storage Capacity: Excellent • Functionality: Excellent • Durability: Excellent
COMMENTS For its price, this bag is impossible to beat, and it was the best of the test regardless of cost. Extremely durable, the Freestyle holds three 3700-size tackle trays, which will tote a ton of baits. There's enough additional storage for tools and a point-and-shoot camera, and everything is readily accessible. It's big enough for use on a boat, and yet not too big to transport when you're walking the bank.



PLANO SOFTSIDER 3700 TACKLE BAG
\$29.99; PLANOMOLDING.COM

BARGAIN RATING Very good

SPECS Size: 15" x 8 1/2" x 9 3/4" • Storage Capacity: Excellent • Functionality: Excellent • Durability: Good
COMMENTS The Plano SoftSider 3700 has nearly identical functionality and storage capacity as the Bass Pro bag, for an extra \$10. Again, three 3700-size trays offer ample storage for baits, which are easy to get at. I think this is the best-looking bag of the bunch, so if looks are a concern, this is a great buy. It didn't fare quite as well in the drum-sander test, but the bag is certainly tough enough for normal use.



BERKLEY POWERBAIT MEDIUM TACKLE BAG
\$29.99; BERKLEY-FISHING.COM

BARGAIN RATING Good

SPECS Size: 13" x 8 1/2" x 7 1/2" • Storage Capacity: Good • Functionality: Fair • Durability: Good
COMMENTS If you can get past the screaming-yellow color and the huge logo, this bag has a lot of solid features for the price. It takes three 3600-size trays, which hold quite a few lures, and I was able to squeeze in a fourth. Unlike the others, this bag opens from the side instead of the top. That makes accessing lures easier if the bag is sitting on the deck of a boat, but harder when it's on your shoulder.



FLAMBEAU AZ3 TACKLE SYSTEM
\$29.99; FLAMBEAUOUTDOORS.COM

BARGAIN RATING Fair

SPECS Size: 10" x 4 3/4" x 5" • Storage Capacity: Fair • Functionality: Excellent • Durability: Excellent
COMMENTS This well-made bag is built to take a beating. But it's comparatively small. Two of the four side pockets are big enough to hold a camera or pliers; the other two don't have much space. The three 3003 Tuff 'Tainer boxes held significantly fewer lures than the other bags. While the AZ3 is probably not what you want for the boat, if bushwhacking and bank fishing is your game, it's just about ideal.



THE TEST

Storage Capacity:

Quite simply, I packed as much gear in each bag as possible and judged whether I had enough lures and tools for a typical day of fishing.

Functionality:

With the bags fully packed, I assessed how easy it was for me to carry and to retrieve baits and equipment.

Durability:

I subjected each bag to 10 minutes of equal pressure using a drum sander to see how the material held up. —M.M.

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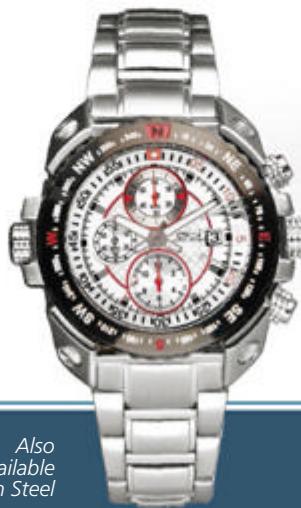


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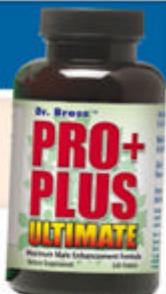


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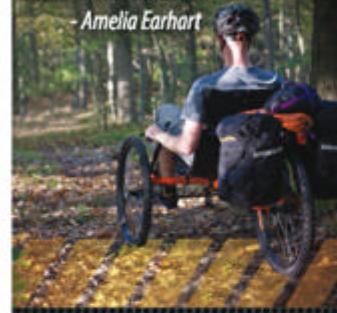
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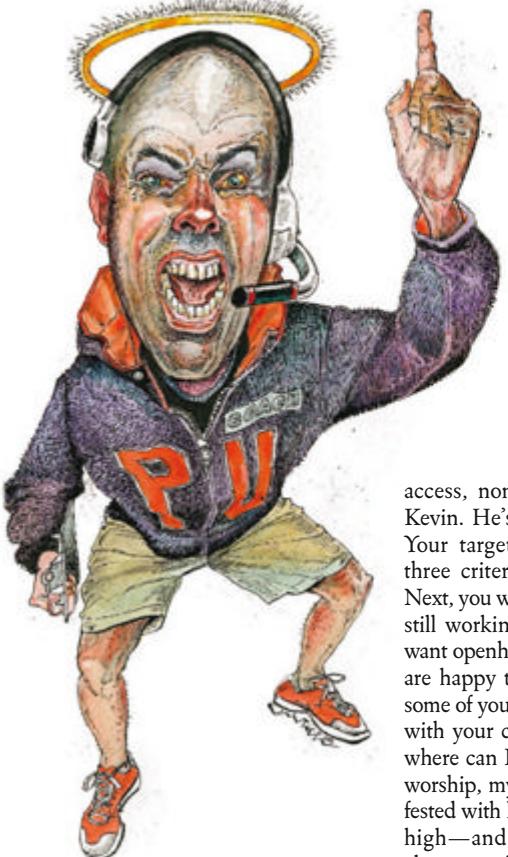
Increase your hunting and fishing hours with these tips **By Bill Heavey**

I DON'T USUALLY tell people this, but I'm a life coach to some of the best-known names in the industry. You know that fishing show with the host who talks so much you wonder how he manages to breathe? Except he never really says anything? He's a client. Those guys on that hunting reality show who make a squirrel hunt sound like a quest for Cape buffalo? Also mine. Yes, those guys are faking it. All the way to the bank. I bet you're wondering how mediocrity could scale such heights. By the rigorous application of Peak Underperformance (PU), a life approach that I developed. I wouldn't be the outdoorsman I am today were it not for this strategy. And if you have a brain in your head, you'll stop reading now, because I am going to share some of my tips with you.

Problem: Your job is stressful and leaves too little downtime for hunting and fishing.

Solution: Stop doing your job. Not completely. Just enough so that while your boss assumes you're working, you're actually watching a YouTube video called "Assassin's Micro Crossbow." Which is this awesome little weapon you can make out of metal hair clips, Popsicle sticks, and dental floss. The thing is the size of a deck of cards and shoots exploding matchstick arrows up to 30 feet. Having trouble getting your waiter's attention in a busy restaurant? Pull this sucker out and see who gets instant service. No wonder the video has more than 4 million views.

But I digress. Here's the drill. First, throttle back to 85 percent of current output.



Know what'll happen? Nothing. Not a ripple. Nobody's paying that much attention to you. This realization may sting at first. But that bitter pill turns to pure sugar soon enough. Because after a week or so, you step it up by cutting it back—to 75 percent. I can already see how much more relaxed you look. You're approaching PU nirvana, a place where neither criticism nor compliments affect your mood, and you're the one sending friends cute videos of cats playing the tuba. Your ultimate goal is to achieve and maintain a 70 percent effort. That's true excellence in mediocrity, what I call "fully realized underperformance." It's that sweet spot where a half-assed effort and a full paycheck meet for beer. At lunch.

Problem: For some reason, Kevin Vandam has your bass boat in his garage. Which is totally unfair. (And everybody still thinks he's a great guy.) It wasn't even that fancy. The whole rig—with a 250-hp Mercury OptiMax Pro XS, four Humminbird Onix fishfinders, a MotorGuide Tour Edition 109 trolling motor, a HydraWave electronic feeding stimulator, and two Power Poles—probably wasn't much over \$70K. You'd put a replacement rig on your credit card if your significant other would just stop overreacting about how the kids won't go to college now.

Solution: Friends with boats. All of the

access, none of the responsibility. Forget Kevin. He's always using the boat anyway. Your targets—yes, plural—need to meet three criteria. There's the boat, naturally. Next, you want overperformers, guys who are still working their brains out. Finally, you want openhanded, good-hearted people who are happy to help a friend. Oh, I can hear some of you whining already. "Easy for a guy with your charm and social skills, Bill. But where can I find guys like that?" Houses of worship, my friend. Many are absolutely infested with hardworking bass-boat owners of high—and exploitably generous—moral character. And regularly scheduled services make planning your trips a breeze. Cast a wide net here. Synagogues and mosques are overlooked hotspots. And the best thing about American freedom of religion is that with the three main faiths holding services on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, you have a potential trifecta of bass-boat borrowing days.

Problem: You meant to buy 500 acres of deer habitat 100 years ago, when it was 50 cents an acre. But you forgot. And your secret public-land hotspot is so crowded that the fire marshal has insisted on lighted EXIT signs.

Solution: Become a long-lost relative to every landowner you meet. This requires thinking outside the genealogical box and adding to your family tree the easy way. Sites like Ancestry.com are fact-based. That hurts you. Fortunately, I'm working on a site where, for a reasonable price, you can cook up a convincing story, complete with documentation, that ties you directly to a given landowner. I'm calling it Accesstry.com. When it comes to hunting land, I don't much mind what you call me as long as I have permission to hunt. For this reason, I've presented myself as Bartłomiej Heazynskiitz to Poles and Billimi Heavimo Ferrari to Italians. I've been Willy Heidiho Heavensen to Norwegians and Bil-lah Boutros al-Hediqi to Saudis. I even did the accents. And, no, it hasn't worked once. Even mediocrity isn't foolproof. It's just the only thing I do really well.



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